


EDWARD MITCHELL BANNISTER





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Kenkeleba House, New York

Whitney Museum of American Art at Champion, Stamford, Connecticut

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Cover:

Untitled (Rhode Island Landscape), 1898

Oil on canvas, 18 x 22 inches

Kenkeleba House, New York

Frontispiece:

Edward Mitchell Bannister, after 1870

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Untitled (Rhode Island Seascape)

c. 1856

Oil on canvas, 7¹/₄ x 13¹/₂ inches
Kenkeleba House, New York

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Untitled (Bass Rock)

n.d.

Oil on canvas, 10 x 14 inches
Kenkeleba House, New York

INTRODUCTION

In 1978, Joe Overstreet, artistic director of Kenkeleba House, and I saw the exhibition “4 from Providence: Black Artists in the Rhode Island Social Landscape” at Rhode Island College in Providence. Curated by Lawrence Sykes, the exhibition included eighteen oils, drawings, and washes painted by Edward Bannister in Rhode Island between 1869 and 1900. Although the number of Bannister works exhibited was relatively large, it was still insufficient to understand the coherence and range of his artistic development. That experience marked the genesis of this exhibition.

In the 1970s, Kenkeleba House was primarily concerned with examining and encouraging contemporary African-American artists. In light of these pursuits, Edward Mitchell Bannister seemed somewhat beyond our immediate concerns. Yet he clearly was a remarkably good painter. And we knew that in order to examine the African-American painting tradition, we would have to understand Bannister’s work. Thus began the search for information about his paintings, his career, and his life.

Although Bannister is mentioned summarily in some early books on American art, important early studies of African-American art give his work nominal attention in comparison to that granted other Black nineteenth-century artists. Moreover, in the few black-and-white reproductions found in these classic references, his glazed paintings, which are difficult to photograph, seemed turbid and murky. In the 1940s, a young respected scholar, James A. Porter, had assessed Bannister as a moderate talent when compared to other African-American painters. Later, when Bannister’s works began to appear in the large historical surveys of African-American art that circulated around the United States in the 1970s and 1980s, the examples of his paintings were too few in number to surmount the critical apathy.

In the ensuing years, my mother, Mary Howard Jennings, became a member of the Providence Art Club. On my initial visit to this private club, I saw a small silhouette of Bannister,

the first in a row of likenesses of early members; it asserted that Bannister was indeed a founding member. Subsequently, I was given access to all the club’s documents for the years Bannister was in Providence. I began collecting stories, and listening again to histories and accounts of my childhood, and discovered that Bannister had lived during the time of my grandfather on a street where my family had lived, the street where I was born. At random intervals, as new paintings came to light, we added them to our research archives. But these additions were difficult to situate in a chronological sequence, since Bannister’s entire oeuvre had not been assembled and examined. In 1989, the Museum Aid Program of the New York State Council on the Arts responded favorably to the Kenkeleba request for funds to research and develop an Edward Bannister exhibition. We engaged Juanita Holland, a Columbia University Ph.D. candidate, first to assist with the research and, in a second year, as education officer to develop public programs featuring the Bannister exhibition.

In part, the difficulty with the reception of Bannister’s painting has to do with the quixotic arena of aesthetic judgment, and with the way five hundred years of racialism has affected every aspect of life in the New World, including aesthetics. As a nineteenth-century African-American who had been the most well-known painter in Rhode Island in his day, Edward Mitchell Bannister nevertheless suffered from invisibility. Excluded from important museum collections, his work received neither wide public attention nor critical interpretation. Although landscape painting had fallen from fashion even before Bannister’s death, there was still an incredible lack of information regarding his contribution to this and other genres. Under such circumstances, the work of Bannister remained obscure outside Rhode Island.

In Rhode Island, some of Bannister’s paintings have appeared in museum exhibitions, in particular at the Rhode Island School of Design (1966, 1986) and the Newport Art Museum (1991). Many other works once donated to the now

defunct collection of the Museum of African Art of the Frederick Douglass Institute are now among the more than one hundred Bannister paintings and works on paper in the National Museum of American Art, Washington, D.C. Many of the works in this collection, however, are known primarily by old labels and need to be correlated with existing exhibition records.

Edward and Christiana Bannister did not have children. When Christiana Bannister died in 1903, two years after her husband, she was penniless, and there was no one left in the family to further public interest in Edward Bannister's work. Thus another major obstacle in Bannister studies has been the dispersal of his art. At his death in 1901, a memorial exhibition of 101 works was assembled by friends and colleagues. A second memorial exhibition of thirty works was held at the Olney Street Baptist Church in 1965. Today, the locations of many of these paintings are unknown. Other paintings are still being housed in the collections of Black colleges, but many of them in the larger collections of the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, were deaccessioned in the 1940s and those of the Providence Art Club in the late 1960s or 1970s. Some larger private collections also were dispersed in the 1940s, 1960s, and 1970s. Although Bannister seems to have been rediscovered on more than one occasion, marketing efforts in the 1960s and 1970s by dealers such as Edward Shein and James Robicheau, while salutary in some respects, brought only a slight adjustment to Bannister's moderate reputation.

Bannister is an extremely exciting, yet perplexing subject because the material needed to answer so many questions seems to have vanished. While he began his career in Boston, his major work was created over a period of thirty years in Rhode Island. As a result of our research, I believe that a major obstacle to Bannister scholarship has been the peculiar history of the State of Rhode Island and the Providence Plantations. Bannister worked amidst some of the deepest contradictions within American society, contradictions that have yet to be fully investigated and openly discussed.

From 1725, when its merchants joined the slave traffic, until 1807, when the importation of slaves was legally abolished, Rhode Island led the nation in the Atlantic slave trade. During colonial times, it had turned to the sea to attain economic solvency, then to the Africa trade to reap profit. Its coastal town, Newport, and the adjacent village of Bristol

were the leading slave ports in the United States; more than ten million gallons of rum were distilled in these ports and shipped to Senegambia and the Gold Coast of Africa in exchange for human lives.¹ In fact, one historian has stated that the American slave trade should properly be called the Rhode Island slave trade.² Evidently, the illegal trade continued well into the 1830s in Rhode Island and even into the next three decades in the South.

Ironically, Rhode Island, founded in 1636 as a haven for personal and religious freedom by the Baptist Roger Williams, agreed in 1676 to the enslavement of the Narragansetts and other Indians on whose land the small colony rested. The contradictions implicit in this religious community's decision to enslave men set a precedent for Rhode Island's acceptance of the Africa trade. Here began the fundamental dichotomy between the area's deep religious faith and its economic practices, a dichotomy that tarnished Rhode Island's history and defined its culture into the present day.

Some two or three years after the Civil War, the Bannisters moved south of Boston to Providence. Christiana Carteaux Bannister was a Narragansett, an Amerindian people who had frequently intermarried with Africans. The Bannisters settled on one of Providence's East Side hills overlooking the Providence River and "the Cove" at the head of Narragansett Bay, in the small Black community that served the families of affluent merchants and shipowners. Bannister could not have lived in Providence without seeing and understanding architecture that had been designed to accommodate the commerce in slavery. After 1887, when he approached the building where the Providence Art Club was housed, he entered a site that had been a homestead of infamous traders.³ Bannister's struggle to survive as an African-American and to develop as a painter, both very difficult pursuits, was ironically made viable in this environment.

Only in recent years has Rhode Island begun to recognize the contributions of its Black citizens and to dissolve its particular brand of segregation. As a result, much of the history of African-Americans in Rhode Island remains concealed in the oral tradition. Records are therefore scanty and difficult to locate and correlate. What documents survive indicate that Bannister won limited acceptance. He would have been viewed as an anomaly: his activities did not threaten the rigid social order that carefully restricted Blacks to positions of service; but as an artist-artisan he was dependent, in part, for



Untitled (Moon over Harbor)

c. 1868

Oil on fiberboard, 9⁵/₈ x 15¹/₄ inches

National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Gift of H. Alan and Melvin Frank



Sunny Landscape

c. 1870

Oil on canvas, 22 x 36 inches

Bomani Gallery, San Francisco

survival on the Rhode Island aristocracy that evolved through the economy of slavery and resultant participation in the American industrialization this wealth made possible. These circumstances influenced the reception of his work and restrained the subject matter of his paintings.

Bannister's landscapes bear examination in the racially charged social context of Rhode Island in particular. Some seem to be located at apparently benign, even idyllic, sites, but ones that speak implicitly to the history of economic and social injustice in America. Many seem to reveal clues that, with further research, hold the promise of amplified meaning. The terrain of *Hay Gatherers* (c. 1893; p. 55) suggests that it was painted in South County, the birthplace of Bannister's wife and the seat of Rhode Island's largest plantations. Close examination reveals that even small, school-age children are involved in the laborious efforts. This reading of *Hay Gatherers* casts another light on *The Mill in Knightsville* (1896; p. 44). Most likely a textile mill, it would have been supplied with raw materials—that most exasperating crop, cotton—from what Maya Angelou called the “remains of slavery’s plantations” in the South.

In light of Bannister's social concerns, the 1885 drawing *The Woodsman* (p. 61) takes on a specific significance. The only winter scene in this exhibition, the drawing is thought to be a dramatization of Bannister's response to the infamous murder of Amasa Sprague.⁴ The Spragues were a powerful political family and owners of a large textile mill. Although the murder was blamed on political intrigue, a young Irish immigrant, John Gordon, was wrongfully accused, tried, and executed. (As a result of the public outcry that followed, Rhode Island rescinded and has never reinstated the death penalty.) Bannister's work for the Sprague family—early on he had painted *Governor Sprague's White Horse* (1869; p. 20)—bears further examination and raises questions of patronage and its effect upon his work. Additional research may reveal that the daring compositions of certain paintings, such as the large seascapes *Bath Road Cliff, Newport* (1889; p. 52) and *Sabin Point, Narragansett Bay* (1885; p. 30), make historical and political statements as well. The undated *Fort Dumpling, Jamestown, Rhode Island* (p. 40) displays a ship similar to the specially designed lightweight “slavers,” sloops built in Rhode Island for the transport of 125–150 people.

Adding to the problem of articulating the Bannister aesthetic has been the recent practice of presenting watercolor

and oil sketches as finished works rather than as studies. A group of works on paper from a Bannister sketchbook that was deaccessioned from the Providence Athenaeum reveals that Bannister was a methodical worker. Some of these drawings can now be correlated with known works. In other cases, careful analysis suggests that paintings once or currently attributed to Bannister may be the work of other hands.

Much has been said about Bannister's spirituality, and the context of this exhibition suggests that the mysterious atmosphere in his paintings and the crystalline energy in the light or in brooding skies are special characteristics that can help confirm or reject attributions. Bannister's affinity with Native American thought also needs analysis, as does the deepening spirituality reflected in his development. In some of the early works, among them *Untitled (Man with Two Oxen)* (1869), man is shown on the frontal plane of the painting, aggrandized and powerful. But as Bannister's work matures, the figures and animals tend to become diminutive in a landscape dominated by nature. Even in the smallest works, land and sky seem vast and enormous. Neither in God's eye nor in Bannister's reflection is man a significant element in nature.

Bannister projects this vision through his point of view. As the painter-recorder, he seems to have positioned himself at the edge of the vista, rather than at the center. He may have initially developed this vantage from studying the light and sky while out at sea, where the sky and ocean can appear infinite and the horizon between disappears. Bannister's ability to paint masterful skies and waterways—rivers, ponds, lakes, swamps, swales, and the sea—speaks for a patient observation of natural formations in motion. This is no less true of water than of skies and clouds, which complete his compositions, defining the overall atmospheric character of the scene. Bannister's skies also materialize as mirror reflections of the total scene, a compositional statement that suggests the universal oneness of all things. Thus, in the pastoral landscape, Bannister's work could be defined by what he constructed and celebrated within his environment. Even the early painting *Untitled (Rhode Island Seascape)* of about 1856 (p. 6) has the germ of ideas that Bannister developed over the course of his career.

We now know that Bannister's compositions themselves provide a clear guide to the identification of his works. His earliest works, such as *Untitled (Rhode Island Seascape)*, are based on proportions and progressions of the Golden

Rectangle, a unifying grid detected in the structures of growing plants and human anatomy that was used by the Ancient Egyptians and Greeks as a means of projecting life and motion.⁵ From 1869, as in *Herdsmen with Cows* (p. 23), through his late work (including *Street Scene* [p. 56]), Bannister seems to have used the Harmonic Grid, another legacy from the Ancients, as the underlying pattern of many of his paintings. Generally, this arithmetic structure is formed by the diagonal lines of squares, rectangles, and their reciprocals intersecting at numerous points. Bannister defined these dynamic areas by light and dark spaces that may appear as trees, branches, or hills. Running through the lower portion of the composition is another diagonal, rendered as an irregular winding space that veers slightly before reaching its destination. This space emerges as a rocky slope, a dark fissure in the earth, a winding river, a path of ocher soil, or a brackish marsh.

In almost every Bannister painting there is another compositional feature that relates to the artist's use of metaphor: a circle of light, often a golden circle. Sometimes, as in *Kid's Road* (1880s; p. 37), there are wide concentric circles, placed vertically, that seem to fall in a rotating pattern of whirling squares. Most frequently, however, the pool of light is horizontal and oval in formation. This circle may be presented as a sunlit pasture on the far side of a darker wood, or as a pond, a partly enclosed shoreline, or a herd of cows grazing. Given the limiting social situation in which Bannister lived, it has been relevatory, but not unexpected, to discern that his paintings evolved within a restrictive structural device through which he found the freedom to express multiple techniques with palette knife, swift brushstrokes, washes, and splattered color.

Bannister's palette developed in a progressive way that illustrates his mastery of tertiary colors, those employed to create light and shadow. He became adept at using subtle increments in gray tones to move from dark to light, especially in his many studies of times of the day—dawn, dusk, evening. Bannister's use of other colors shows a gradual shift over the years. He left the cerulean blue of his early paintings and became increasingly more comfortable with deeper blues and the siennas, umbers, viridian, earth greens, and ocher he found in the Rhode Island seasonal display. Another evolution in his use of color may be observed in his mastery of glazing; compare the early, crude efforts of the mid-1850s with the

brilliant, clear summer sky and cool blue tints of the 1885 *Palmer River* (p. 31). Further study of Bannister's technique, color, and the nature of his materials is required.

During the course of collecting material for this exhibition, six hundred paintings and works on paper have been identified. A conservative estimate would put the number of Bannister works at more than a thousand. However, there is no central data base of Black institutional collections. Certain major paintings, including the renowned *Under the Oaks* and other large commissioned works, have yet to be located. Still other identified paintings that might have been included here are in inaccessible private collections. It is hoped that this exhibition will initiate a renewed interest in Bannister's work, so that a future generation will be able to mount the definitive Bannister exhibition.

CORRINE JENNINGS

Director, Kenkeleba House

1. Jay Coughtry, *The Notorious Triangle: Rhode Island and the African Slave Trade, 1700-1807* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), p. 84.

2. Ibid.

3. George Leland Miner, *Angell's Lane: The History of a Little Street in Providence* (Providence: Ackerman-Standard Press, 1948).

4. Interview with Dorothy McGunigle, former curator of the collection, Providence Art Club, September 27, 1992.

5. Jay Hambridge, *The Elements of Dynamic Symmetry* (New York: Dover Publications, 1967).



Scene Along the Connecticut River, Westmoreland

c. 1870

Oil on canvas, 20 x 30 inches

Harvard Musical Association, Boston



Christiana Carteaux Bannister

n.d.

Oil on canvas, 35 1/2 x 28 inches

Newport Art Museum, Rhode Island

Extended loan from Bannister Nursing Care Center

REACHING THROUGH THE VEIL: AFRICAN-AMERICAN ARTIST

EDWARD MITCHELL BANNISTER

Edward Mitchell Bannister's life and career encompassed pivotal events in nineteenth-century America's political and cultural history. As an artist, he reflected the changing values in American landscape painting in the second half of the nineteenth century. As an African-American, he fought the evils of slavery and struggled to win respect and fame against overwhelming odds. As a New England painter, respected by his peers and sought after by collectors, his career was nonetheless framed by his racial identity: a Black man required to sit in the Jim Crow section, and just "another inquisitive colored man" when he appeared at a museum door.¹

Bannister, the son of Hannah and Edward Bannister, was born in St. Andrews, a small seaport town at the mouth of the St. Croix River in New Brunswick, Canada. His birthdate has been given as 1828, but it now seems more likely that he was born a year or two earlier. His father, who may have been from Barbados, died in 1832.² Edward and his younger brother William were raised by their mother, and the artist later remembered that "the love of art in some form came to me from my mother who was born within a stone's throw of my birth-place, on the banks of the St. Croix river. She it was who encouraged and fostered my childhood propensities for drawing and coloring. She helped me with my lessons, which I was prone to neglect, for the more congenial work of drawing."³ By the time he was ten, Bannister's drawings of friends and family had won him some local acclaim.⁴

After the death of their mother in 1844, Edward and William were sent to live and work on the estate of wealthy lawyer and maritime trader Harris Hatch until they reached adulthood. There the young artist developed his lifelong devotion to music and literature,⁵ and took every opportunity to draw. "The results of his pen," recalled writer and friend George Forbes, "might be seen on the fences and barn door or wherever else he could charcoal or crayon out rude likenesses of men or things about him."⁶ Like many young men in

this region, Bannister apparently worked for a time on ships along the Canadian coast before deciding to move to the United States.⁷

AN AFRICAN-AMERICAN IN BOSTON

By 1850, the Bannister brothers were living in Boston and working as hairdressers.⁸ The choice of Boston was pivotal, both for Edward Bannister's developing identity as an African-American and for his eventual direction as an artist. From the 1830s on, Boston was a national center of both White and Black abolitionist activity. Its African-American community constituted the third largest population of free Blacks in the northeast, and one of the most politically active in the country.⁹ In addition, Boston, sometimes called "the American Athens," was a center for intellectual and artistic achievement in nineteenth-century America.¹⁰

The Boston that Bannister knew, however, was not the genteel society of Boston's cultural elite. Although one of the more hospitable northern cities for African-Americans in terms of suffrage and education, it was still blighted by the everyday humiliations and impediments of racism. Free African-American men and women were restricted to separate neighborhoods, and segregated into Jim Crow sections on public transportation, in churches, and in many public institutions. Sparked by pro- and anti-slavery factions, Boston was often a dangerous place, and African-Americans, whether lawyers or laborers, were ridiculed in the press and sometimes attacked on the streets.¹¹

Bannister's Canadian childhood may have helped nurture his desire to become an artist. It is possible that he experienced little in his small village that would lead him to consider his race as an obstacle to this pursuit.¹² Such an optimistic outlook was impossible for most American Black children, who early on learned that even the most determined

and fortunate might never loosen the crippling grip of a racist society. William Cooper Nell, the respected nineteenth-century African-American activist and writer, remembered a Boston childhood so embittered by racism that when asked by a teacher to describe his aspirations, he replied, "What's the use of my trying to be somebody? I can never be anything but a nigger anyhow."¹³

Indeed, Boston taught Bannister a bitter lesson in reality for an African-American with such lofty ambitions. Contemporary biographers described his disheartening and fruitless search for an established artist who would accept him as a student.⁴ Denied the academic tutelage, studio apprenticeships, or foreign travel that were the training grounds for young White American artists, Bannister took whatever work was available to support himself and studied art independently in his free hours. Museum visits and interaction with other artists were his academy.

It is difficult to speculate what access a Black artist might have had to Boston's art collections, since respected African-Americans were regularly denied entrance to many aspects of Boston's cultural life, including admission to some museums.¹⁵ The Boston Athenaeum would have been Bannister's most likely resource for the study of original art. This institution was a regular advertiser in a leading national anti-slavery newspaper, *The Liberator*, which makes it probable that African-Americans were welcome or at least tolerated at its exhibitions. Bannister could have seen a wide variety of artistic accomplishment at the Athenaeum, whose exhibitions included the canon of European masters as well as celebrated American artists.

By 1853, Bannister had found work as a hairdresser in the establishment of Madame Christiana Carteaux, a successful Black businesswoman who owned a string of fashionable beauty salons in Boston and Providence.¹⁶ He still, however, managed to study and work as an artist, and by the mid-1850s had become known in the Black community for his skill at crayon portraits.¹⁷

In 1854, Bannister received his first commission for an oil painting, entitled *The Ship Outward Bound* (whereabouts unknown), from Dr. John V. DeGrasse, a leading citizen of Boston's Black community.¹⁸ The painting depicted a ship under full sail, departing the harbor for a distant port. *The Liberator* reported on the commission, which was to be the first of Bannister's many seascapes.¹⁹ Raised near the sea, the

artist returned to this theme throughout his life; indeed, judging from the few extant paintings of his early years, views of the sea represented his first foray into scene painting.

The Ship Outward Bound probably had the flattened perspectives and linearity of Bannister's only extant works from this period, and the structure and style of these early works suggest the inspiration of the paintings of Fitz Hugh Lane and John Frederick Kensett, who both exhibited at the Athenaeum in the 1850s. It is also possible that Bannister benefited from the company of other young artists who, like him, sketched and painted along the Rhode Island coast and at Boston's harbors. His many sketches of ships in the harbor²⁰ speak for his familiarity with Lane's studies of Boston and New England harbors. Bannister's *Untitled (Rhode Island Seascape)* (c. 1856; p. 6) documents his growing assimilation of techniques of perspective, atmosphere, and composition. In style, composition, and mood, its weighted rocks and decorative-edged waves lapping the shore seem to lie somewhere between folk paintings such as the anonymous *Meditation by the Sea* (c. 1860; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) and works by his contemporaries, like Kensett's 1861 *Narragansett Bay* or Martin Johnson Heade's *Approaching Storm, Beach Near Newport* of the 1860s (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston). The taut horizontal stretch of buildings and land in the background of Bannister's seascape recalls Lane's similar treatments in works such as *Babson and Ellery Houses, Gloucester* (1863; Cape Ann Historical Association). A later work by Bannister, *Untitled (Moon over Harbor)* (c. 1868; p. 11), is a study of reflected evening light on the still harbor water that may have been inspired by such earlier paintings as Lane's 1850–55 *Boston Harbor at Sunset*.

It is important to note at this point that a comprehensive discussion of Bannister's sources and his stylistic evolution must await further research and archival investigation, which will reveal clearer artistic associations as more of Bannister's works are discovered, correctly attributed, and dated. The present essay is primarily focused on the newly discovered biographical information which is so crucial a component of Bannister's artistic experience.

In this context, the subject of a ship leaving harbor, as in Bannister's *The Ship Outward Bound*, had both personal and political relevance to the artist. The image was a powerful symbol in African-American culture during the days of slavery, evoking the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade.



Prudence Nelson Bell

1864

Oil on canvas, 25 x 21 inches

Collection of Mrs. Charles W. Johnson, Jr.



Governor Sprague's White Horse

1869

Oil on canvas, 23 x 30 inches

Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence

Moreover, African-Americans in Boston had spent the past four years resisting the forced return of fugitive slaves, as mandated by the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, and often watched these wretched souls sail from Boston harbors back to their Southern owners. These “ships outward bound” were often floating prisons, visible reminders of the valiant efforts of Boston’s Black community to save escaping slaves. Conversely, for some of these fugitives, the image could also represent escape to England, where slavery had been outlawed in 1808. Emotionally resonant on so many levels to African-Americans, Bannister’s seascapes must be read as more than compositional studies of ships, sky, and sea.

BANNISTER THE ACTIVIST

Bannister’s friends and acquaintances in Boston were those African-Americans most active in the fight against slavery and prejudice, and these were also the people who initially gave him financial support and artistic recognition. As noted earlier, Bannister’s first important commission came from an African-American patron. And it was ardent abolitionist William Cooper Nell who wrote the first published acknowledgment of Bannister as a rising young artist in his 1855 *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution*.²¹ In these same years, Bannister strengthened his associations with prominent African-Americans. Along with fellow artist William H. Simpson and lawyer George L. Ruffin, Bannister sang with the Crispus Attucks Choir, a regular feature at political and social events among Boston’s African-Americans.²² Ruffin and Simpson also joined Bannister, Nell, Jacob Andrews, and Christiana Carteaux in the African-American Histrionic Club.²³ The club performed dramatic selections in and around Boston and satirical farces at political meetings.²⁴

Bannister married Christiana Carteaux on June 10, 1857. By 1858 he was able to list himself as an artist in Boston’s city directory. Carteaux in this context must be considered Bannister’s first and most important patron. Her financial success and support freed Bannister from the necessity of earning a living as a barber and enabled him to concentrate on his development as an artist. Bannister credited Christiana with critical guidance as well. Later in life, he reflected, “I would have made out very poorly had it not been for her, and my

greatest successes have come through her, either through her criticisms of my pictures, or the advice she would give me in the matter of placing them in public.”²⁵

Not surprisingly, Bannister’s formative years as a young artist were shaped by the sensibilities of his African-American colleagues, and his artistic ambition was encouraged by their goals. His determination to become an artist can be seen as part of the tradition of achievement and excellence fostered by men and women like Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, Frances Ellen Harper, John S. Rock, and Charles Lenox Remond, to name but a few. Free Blacks in the North found in achievement an important key to the struggle against slavery and racism. The pursuit of excellence became a means by which to hold back the deluge of racial stereotypes in literature and art. These women and men asked with good cause: “What hand has refused to fan the flame of popular prejudice against us? What American artist has not caricatured us? What songster has not made merry over our depressed spirits? What press has not ridiculed and condemned us?”²⁶ For these African-Americans, every successful businessperson, doctor, lawyer, writer, or artist was living proof that Blacks could excel in any area of White American society; and that proof struck a blow against the beliefs that fostered slavery and racism. Achievement was not only a matter of personal pride; it was their duty to the race. At an 1858 celebration, Bannister heard John Rock, a brilliant African-American physician and lawyer, express these very sentiments: “The colored man who, by dint of perseverance and industry, educates and elevates himself, prepares the way for others, gives character to the race, and hastens the day of general emancipation.”²⁷

That Bannister counted himself among these “race men” can be seen by his active and public role in the anti-slavery activities of his community, working in African-American abolitionist organizations and sometimes taking the platform to speak at public events.²⁸ He and Christiana boarded for two years with Lewis Hayden, a fiery Black activist whose home was an important stop on the Underground Railroad.²⁹ Bannister’s political awareness must have been sharpened by the flow of fugitives that passed through Hayden’s home. As a member of the Colored Citizens of Boston, an abolitionist organization, Bannister functioned as recording secretary at meetings, and his name appeared on abolitionist petitions, alongside Boston’s most prominent Black activists, in *The Liberator*.³⁰

In 1863, as recording secretary for the Union Progressive Association,³¹ Bannister participated in the most historic event for African-Americans of that period. President Lincoln had announced that he would issue an emancipation order freeing slaves by the beginning of the new year. The Association scheduled meetings throughout the day of January 1, 1863, to await the proclamation, and Bannister recorded the stirring speeches of Brown, Nell, and Douglass at Tremont Temple. As the day wore on and no word came from Washington, the crowd grew despondent. Finally, in the evening, when everyone was ready to give up, a messenger ran in waving the Emancipation Proclamation, which had just been sent over the wires. Douglass strode to the front of the platform and led the jubilant crowd in a stirring hymn, "Blow ye the trumpet, blow." Bannister joined in the tumultuous celebration, which lasted throughout the night and into the morning.³² After Emancipation, Bannister continued to fight for the rights of all African-Americans. In December 1865 he attended and was part of the fund-raising efforts of the Convention of the Colored People of New England.³³

BANNISTER THE ARTIST

The presence of other African-American artists in Boston, as both role models and colleagues, must be considered crucial to Bannister's experiences as a young artist. His earliest exposure to African-American accomplishments in art probably came in June 1855, when a panorama by successful African-American daguerreotypist Thomas Ball, *Ball's Mammoth Pictorial Tour of the United States*, came to Boston. As advertised in *The Liberator*, the 23,000-square-foot panorama was "painted by Negroes" and depicted Southern scenes of slavery and a voyage from Africa to America.³⁴

Bannister knew the other African-American artists in Boston, with whom he shared common problems of patronage and access to study and museum collections. He and sculptor Edmonia Lewis maintained studios two doors apart at the Studio Building, exhibited at the same abolitionist fairs, and moved in the same circles of patronage. Bannister's friendship with William H. Simpson was deepened by shared political and social associations, and for several years they lived in the same boarding house. Later, painter Nelson Primus sought out Bannister when he moved from Connecticut to Boston,

acknowledging Bannister as the older, established Black artist who might function as his mentor.³⁵

The example of Ball's success, Bannister's acquaintance with the small but active circle of Black artists, and the supportive climate of Boston's Black community surely helped offset the negative effects of the obstacles Bannister found in the White art world.

Sometime around 1862 Bannister spent a year studying photography in New York City. Returning to Boston in 1863, he listed his profession as photographer. Like African-American artists Robert Scott Duncanson and Henry Ossawa Tanner, he probably turned to photography as a source of income, while he struggled to achieve success as a painter. Unfortunately, no photographs have been discovered from those years, and we can only speculate on this phase of his career.

Bannister's inclusion in William Wells Brown's 1863 *The Black Man: His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements* marked the African-American community's continued acknowledgment of the artist's rising stature and his political involvement. Brown places Bannister among the ranks of exemplary African-Americans who, by their accomplishments and dedication, were furthering the cause. The artist is described as "spare-made and slim, with an interesting cast of countenance, quick in his walk, and easy in his manners. Mr. Bannister has a good education." Mentioning Bannister's foray into history painting (*Cleopatra Waiting to Receive Marc Antony*; whereabouts unknown), Brown also gives us our earliest glimpse into Bannister's studio: a genre scene, *Wall Street at Home* (whereabouts unknown), "represents the old gent, seated in his easy chair, boots off and slippers on, and intently reading the last news. The carpet with its variegated colors, the hat upon the table, the cloak thrown carelessly across a chair, and the pictures hanging on the wall, all are brought out with their lights and shades." Bannister is also at work on "a beautiful landscape, representing summer, with the blue mountains in the distance, the heated sky, and the foliage to match. . . ."³⁶

In the mid-1860s, Bannister's access to the White arts community began to increase. Around 1863, he was finally able to receive some formal training; he became the only African-American artist in the evening drawing classes of Dr. William Rimmer, noted physician and sculptor. Bannister was apparently quite popular among the young artists in Rimmer's



Herdsman with Cows

1869

Oil on canvas, 31 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 51 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches

National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Gift of Harry Leven



Untitled (Floral Still Life)

n.d.

Oil on canvas, 30 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 25 inches

National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Gift of H. Alan and Melvin Frank

class, who included Martin Milmore, Edwin Lord Weeks, John Arnold, and William Norton. John Arnold had met Bannister a few weeks earlier, visiting Bannister's studio at the urging of another artist who had been impressed with Bannister's work. Arnold remembered that the works he saw "bore the undoubted hall-mark of genius. . . ." By October 1864, Bannister had acquired space in the Studio Building, where other Boston artists—among them J.F. Cole, John La Farge, William Morris Hunt, Elihu Vedder, and William Rimmer—also had rooms during those years.³⁸

Although Bannister is primarily remembered as a landscape painter, he advertised himself as a portrait painter for the first ten years of his career. Portraiture was often an easier way for young painters to win commissions, but it was also of great importance in the Black community. African-Americans, surrounded by images in newspapers, magazines, posters, and minstrel shows that caricatured and dehumanized them, sought dignified and ennobling portrayals of themselves. In this sense, portraits served as more than vanities or memorials; Black Americans understood the importance of the image as a visual symbol of rank in American society, and they demanded equal treatment.

There are few surviving examples from Bannister's years as a portraitist. His only extant work from 1864 is a memorial portrait of *Prudence Nelson Bell* (p. 19), commissioned by her son-in-law and daughter, the Reverend Robert and Evelina Johnson, African-American abolitionists and friends of William Lloyd Garrison.³⁹ The Johnsons may have seen Bannister's advertisements in *The Liberator*, offering his services as a portrait painter.⁴⁰ Mrs. Bell's portrait is a straightforward likeness against a neutral background. Bannister's later portrait of his wife, *Christiana Carteaux Bannister* (p. 16), probably completed at the beginning of the 1870s, is a more detailed and vibrant portrayal, displaying a better understanding of volume and depth, as Mrs. Bannister sits more firmly weighted in three-dimensional space. Tightly painted with little atmosphere, the work nevertheless has a tonal unity and psychological penetration that softens and enlivens the subject. Mrs. Bannister's expression seems to encompass both compassion and inner strength, and the rich details of her dress, chair, and the vase at her elbow help create a loving and elegant portrait of this remarkable woman.

Bannister donated a full-length portrait (whereabouts unknown) of Boston's martyred hero Robert Gould Shaw,

Colonel of the 54th Colored Regiment, to a Soldiers' Relief Fair organized by Christiana in the autumn of 1864. The portrait was raffled, along with other valuable donations, to raise money for the widows and orphans of slain Black soldiers. Lydia Marie Child cited the painting in a letter reprinted in *The Liberator* and in another letter to Colonel Shaw's mother.⁴¹

The problems of paternalism in White abolitionist patronage are evident in Child's letter to Mrs. Shaw. A tireless fighter for emancipation, Child nevertheless expressed her interest and support for Black artists like Bannister and Edmonia Lewis as an indulgent guardian shepherding the fumbling efforts of beloved children. Dubious of Lewis' ability to do good work, she was "agreeably surprised" at the sculptor's portrait bust of Colonel Shaw, completed after Bannister's painting was exhibited, and she found it "very good, without making allowances for circumstances." In Bannister's portrait of Shaw, she found "something very beautiful and pathetic in these efforts by a humble and oppressed people to canonize the memory of the young hero who died for them."⁴² This attitude must have grated on both artists, for they later insisted on having their work judged solely on the basis of aesthetic merit. When Bannister later won a first prize medal at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, he declared, "I was and am proud to know that the jury of award did not know anything about me, my antecedents, color or race. There was no sentimental sympathy leading to the award of the medal."⁴³

By 1866, Bannister's name was appearing in Boston art reviews. His work was included in a gallery auction featuring Boston artists, and a reviewer from the *Daily Evening Transcript* visited Bannister in his studio at work upon a landscape which "displays great talent for one who has had so little practice . . ."; he urged that "all lovers of art should visit him."⁴⁴ Black artistic accomplishment was rarely recognized in American society. Bannister was apparently deeply offended by an 1867 *New York Herald* article which declared "that the Negro seems to have an appreciation of art, but is manifestly unable to produce it."⁴⁵ He became more than ever determined to change such attitudes by his own example.

In 1868, Bannister entered a partnership with artist Asa R. Lewis, about whom very little is known. Up to this point, he had always publicly identified himself as a portrait painter. As part of "Bannister & Lewis," he declared himself both a



Lencothea Rescuing Ulysses

1891

Oil on canvas, 9 x 12 inches
Newport Hospital, Rhode Island

portrait and a landscape painter. The workings of this partnership remain a mystery, but it was in any case brief: by 1869, Lewis and Bannister had both left Boston and the partnership was dissolved.

SUCCESS IN PROVIDENCE

By October 1869, Bannister and his wife had moved to Providence, Rhode Island. Bannister had traveled in Rhode Island since the beginning of his career, and Madame Carteaux was a Rhode Island native with a thriving business establishment in Providence. But a more important factor in the Bannisters' decision to relocate was probably the changing climate of postwar Boston. At the end of the Civil War, Boston received massive waves of freed-slave immigrants from the South. Racial tensions increased as working-class Whites more openly vented their hostility toward the Black population, whom they had always seen as competitors for jobs and housing. Moreover, after Emancipation, Boston's White abolitionist elite was no longer as deeply concerned with the African-American community. Both before and after Emancipation, many Whites sympathetic to the abolition of slavery were more comfortable with the abstract idea than they were with mingling with African-Americans on a daily basis. In the postwar years, abolitionists' sympathetic associations with the Black intellectual community were also cooled by the thousands of uneducated former slaves who now filled their streets.⁴⁶

Although Bannister was a respected artist accepted by the Providence art community, he still lived, as in Boston, in a city divided by race. On the way to his studio, or traveling to Boston or New York, he had to contend with segregated public transportation. Doors of many public institutions remained closed to him, and there was little legal protection against public abuse of African-Americans. Providence theaters often billed blackface minstrel performances that contributed to the White community's stereotypical perceptions of African-Americans.⁴⁷

As in Boston, Bannister associated with the leaders of the Black community in Providence as well as in Newport, where African-Americans had been politically and socially active since the eighteenth century.⁴⁸ His lifelong friend George Downing, Jr., with whom he had worked on political issues in Boston, was a wealthy Black businessman who lobbied tire-

lessly for reform in Boston and Rhode Island throughout his life. Reverend Mahlon Van Horne, a respected politician and diplomat, worked with the Bannisters to serve the Black community. John Hope, the second African-American graduate of Brown University, was active in the religious and political life of Providence and counted Bannister as his friend.⁴⁹

Providence and Newport provided fertile ground for the growth of an arts community. Textiles and metal manufacture had fostered the training of designers and craftsmen since the 1854 exhibition of the Rhode Island Art Association.⁵⁰ Fortunes made from these businesses or, ironically, from the earlier slave trade along Rhode Island coasts, provided a base of wealthy patronage that supported a growing number of artists.

Upon his arrival in Providence in 1869, Bannister exhibited two works probably completed in his last year in Boston: *Portrait of Garrison* (whereabouts unknown) and *Newspaper Boy* (National Museum of American Art, Washington, D.C.), one of his few surviving African-American subjects.⁵¹ The Garrison portrait documents Bannister's continuing involvement with abolitionist issues and also marks his ongoing work as a portraitist. *Newspaper Boy*, Bannister's portrayal of a young light-skinned newspaper vendor, predates Henry O. Tanner's 1890s genre studies of African-Americans at the lower end of the economic scale. Although fellow Bostonian Ralph Waldo Emerson romanticized the newsboy as "that humble priest of politics, finance, philosophy and religion,"⁵² Bannister's straightforward presentation does not resort to the cloying sentiment so often employed by artists in the late 1860s dealing with homeless and working children as genre subjects.⁵³

Bannister's first studio in Providence was a room at the Mercantile National Bank Building. He joined the community of White artists working there, including Thomas Robinson, John Arnold, Frederick S. Batcheller, and James Lincoln. There are three extant Bannister paintings from 1869, which feature monumental figures and animals in interior and exterior settings: *Governor Sprague's White Horse* (p. 20), *Untitled (Man with Two Oxen)*, and *Herdsman with Cows* (p. 23). The popularity of romantic animal depictions by European painters such as Delacroix and Géricault was heightened in America with the enormously successful exhibition of Rosa Bonheur's *Horse Fair*. The American public could see it on tour in 1859 or purchase one of the many engravings of it offered through popular publications.⁵⁴ With the influence of Barbizon painters such as Constant Troyon and Jean-François



Untitled (Man on Horseback, Woman on Foot Driving Cattle)

1880

Oil on canvas, 16 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 22 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches

National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Gift of H. Alan and Melvin Frank

Millet, American animal painters began to focus on a more nostalgic appreciation of domesticated farm animals.⁵⁵ Thomas Robinson, whom Bannister could have met either in Boston or Providence, and who had studied with Auguste Bonheur, brother of Rosa, painted animals that were inspired by the menagerie of farm animals he kept behind his studio in Providence.⁵⁶

Bannister's 1869 *Governor Spragne's White Horse*, which depicts a high-strung beast locked in a dynamic compositional confrontation with its groom, seems closer to Bonheur's and Géricault's romanticized animal depictions than the hard-working oxen of *Untitled (Man with Two Oxen)* and *Herdsmen with Cows*, which reflect a more Barbizon sensibility in theme if not in style. Here monumentalized domestic farm animals take equal billing with toiling farmers, the American version of French peasants. These large compositions indicate Bannister's growing confidence as an artist, although he still seems to be experimenting with a variety of techniques. Instead of the loose, sketchy brushwork and subdued palette of *Newspaper Boy*, these three canvases are tightly painted and highly finished, almost airless, with large flat areas of color and a linear outlining of forms that stress detail rather than atmospheric impression.

Bannister, as we have seen, worked in a variety of genres. His undated *Untitled (Floral Still Life)* (p. 24) is a vibrant and tactile exploration of the subject. His literary interests led to mythological themes such as *Lencothea Rescuing Ulysses* (1891; p. 26) and scenes from Spenser's *Faerie Queene*.⁵⁷ Religious compositions were also an important component of Bannister's work. A number of his large biblical scenes are documented in reviews or surviving drawings. His undated *Saint Luke* reveals a greater sophistication in portrait style, while it remains a reverent expression of his deeply religious sensibilities.

But judging from the extant works of the Providence years and documented exhibitions, Bannister concentrated increasingly on interpreting the coastlines and inland views of the Rhode Island landscape.⁵⁸ Paintings such as *The Mill in Knightsville* (1896; p. 44) and *Fort Dumpling, Jamestown, Rhode Island* (undated; p. 40) are two of the many that document specific and well-known Rhode Island locales. Bannister may have regarded landscape painting as a genre in which he could more easily overcome what he felt were his technical shortcomings. His only formal artistic training, with William Rim-

mer, had been relatively brief, and he never achieved the proficiency he must have wished for in depicting the human figure. Fellow artist John Arnold remembered Bannister's frustration with technical problems—he would sometimes destroy the work of weeks in a moment.⁵⁹ He told an interviewer that “whatever may be my success as an artist is due more to inherited potential than to instruction,”⁶⁰ and he wrote in frustration to Whitaker, “All I would do I cannot . . . simply for the want of proper training.”⁶¹

Despite these regrets, Bannister enjoyed increasing success as an artist during the 1870s. In 1872 he won an award of premium at the Rhode Island Industrial Exhibition for *Summer Afternoon* (whereabouts unknown) and began submitting works to the Boston Art Club.⁶² Bannister does not seem to have exhibited at this conservative arts club for Boston's elite until after his move to Providence and the subsequent growth in his professional renown.⁶³ Throughout the late 1870s and 1880s he submitted works frequently, as did many other well-known American artists.

By 1872, Bannister had taken a studio in the Woods Building, where he worked for the remainder of his career. The fourth floor, known as the “artists' floor,” also housed the studios of Sidney Burleigh, John Arnold, James Lincoln, and Frederick S. Batcheller. Bannister's easel was directly under the skylight, which flooded his studio with light, and he stacked sketches and paintings along the walls. Hung on the walls were his wife's portrait and his paintings depicting scenes from Spenser's *Faerie Queene*; he kept a vase of dry grasses and autumn leaves before him as he worked.⁶⁴

In 1876 Bannister exhibited *Under the Oaks* (whereabouts unknown) in the Massachusetts Centennial Art Exhibition at the Boston Art Club.⁶⁵ The *Daily Evening Traveller* cited the painting as one of the two best works in the show, and “the greatest of its kind that we have seen from an American artist.” The reporter compared Frederick Douglass' talent in oratory with Bannister's talent in art as an “example of the power of this race to achieve great results in art.”⁶⁶

When *Under the Oaks* reached the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, it won a first prize medal for painting, garnering national attention for Bannister's work.⁶⁷ His reception by the awards committee has been described many times. George Whitaker paraphrased Bannister's own recounting of the moment: “I learned from the newspapers that ‘54’ had received a first prize medal, so I hurried to the Committee



Sabin Point, Narragansett Bay

1885

Oil on canvas, 37 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 64 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches

Brown University, Gardner House, Providence, Rhode Island

Bequest of Dr. and Mrs. George W. Gardner



Palmer River

1885

Oil on canvas, 24 x 34 inches

Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Daniel R. Mechnig



Untitled (Landscape with Man on Horse)

1884

Oil on canvas, 26¹/₈ x 40¹/₈ inches

National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Gift of Irwin M. Sparr



Sunset

c. 1875–80

Oil on canvas, 20¹/₄ x 28¹/₈ inches

National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Gift of Elliott and Rhoda Liffland

Rooms to make sure the report was true. There was a great crowd there ahead of me. As I jostled among them many resented my presence, some actually commenting within my hearing in a most petulant manner, what is that colored person in here for? Finally when I succeeded in reaching the desk where inquiries were made, I endeavored to gain the attention of the official in charge. He was very insolent. Without raising his eyes, he demanded in the most exasperating tone of voice, 'Well what do you want here any way? Speak lively.' 'I want to enquire concerning 54. Is it a prize winner?' 'What's that to you,' said he? In an instant my blood was up: the looks that passed between him and others in the room were unmistakable. I was not an artist to them, simply an inquisitive colored man; controlling myself, I said deliberately, 'I am interested in the report that *Under the Oaks* has received a prize; I painted the picture.' An explosion could not have made a more marked impression. Without hesitation he apologized, and soon every one in the room was bowing and scraping to me."⁶⁸ As noted earlier, Bannister had wanted neither racism nor "sentimental sympathy" to affect the judges' decision. It was for this reason that he submitted the work with only a signature attached.

Under the Oaks was also reviewed by two African-American writers for the *A.M.E. Christian Recorder*, so that a large African-American readership was well apprised of the award. Robert Douglass, Jr., himself a respected Philadelphia painter, discussed the painting in an art review as a "quiet pastoral scene. . . it is much admired and . . . recalls some of the best efforts of Constable."⁶⁹ Professor J.P. Sampson described it as "a four by six feet picture, representing in the foreground, a herd of sheep along the [stream] while further in the background is a beautiful ascent, with a cluster of oaks, wide spread in their branches, like a great shed; and beneath this shelter can be seen numerous cows and sheep taking shelter from the storm." Sampson noted how important Bannister's award was for the African-American community, stating that "Mr. B. . . comprehends fully the importance of competing in the world of art."⁷⁰ Bannister was not the only African-American exhibiting at the fair. Edmonia Lewis had submitted several sculptures, which were displayed in the Women's Pavilion. One, her *Death of Cleopatra*, was the subject of excited critical attention.

The only remaining record of *Under the Oaks* is Bannister's drawing for it, which appeared in the *Massachusetts Centennial*

Album.⁷¹ In style and composition, *Under the Oaks* may have resembled Bannister's 1876 *Oak Trees* (National Museum of American Art, Washington, D.C.). Stands of trees in the middle ground were among his favorite compositional devices. They function as dark masses that move the eye through the painting, while subtle accents create patches of light or mid-night-blue shadows that allow the viewer to penetrate the foliage and experience its depth.

Experimentation was clearly part of a lifelong process of artistic education for Bannister, and he seems to have easily quoted different styles as they suited his vision for a particular work. *Under the Oaks* was likened by one reviewer to Constable, and *Oak Trees* seems closer to Hudson River sensibilities than Bannister's 1877 *Untitled (Trees and Shrubbery)* (p. 42) and *The Palmer River, Rehoboth, Massachusetts*, both of which illustrate his affinity for free and lushly rendered surfaces. Works from the 1880s such as *Kid's Road* (p. 37) and *Palmer River* (1885; p. 31) retain that painterliness, but with a clarity of light and mood that is clearly distinct from *Untitled (Cows Descending Hillside)* (1881) and *Untitled (Landscape with Man on Horse)* (1884; p. 32).

Bannister's works from the late 1870s and 1880s document his interest in cloud studies and atmospheric skies. Specificity of weather and time of day are important components. The atmospheric clarity and the careful treatment of cloud masses in *Untitled (Man on Horseback, Woman on Foot Driving Cattle)* (1880; p. 28) and the 1885 *Palmer River* suggest Bannister's familiarity with Hudson River landscape painters.

The series of sunset paintings Bannister produced, including *Untitled (Landscape with Man on Horse)* (1884) and *Sunset* (c. 1875–80; p. 33), reveal how he worked through problems of light and color in his spiritual interpretations of nature, in skies suffused with dramatic swirls of color that suggest the influence of J.M.W. Turner. Both John Ruskin, in his influential *Modern Painters*, and Washington Allston praised Turner; Asher B. Durand, in his *Letters on Landscape Painting*, said that "Turner's skies 'approached nearer to the representation of the infinity of Nature than all that have gone before him.'"⁷² This certainly would have fit with Bannister's aim to present "the spiritual . . . in all created things."⁷³ These sunset paintings also have the same spiritual resonance of many Millet landscapes, where the drama and wonder of God's sky bathes the small human or animal figures below in a warm and pious light. But in execution and mood they also recall the dreamy



Untitled (Landscape with Bridge)

n.d.

Watercolor on paper, 19 x 29½ inches
Kenkeleba House, New York



At the Oakside Beach

late 1870s

Oil on canvas, 8 1/2 x 12 1/2 inches

Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates



Kid's Road

1880s

Oil on canvas, 5 x 8 inches

Collection of Warren and Charlynn Goins



Untitled

1888

Oil on canvas, 16 x 24 inches
Kenkeleba House, New York

and evocative style of paintings like Ralph Blakelock's *The Sun, Serene, Sinks into the Slumbering Sea* (1880; Museum of Fine Arts, Springfield, Massachusetts).

A lecture given by Bannister to his colleagues in 1886 is the only surviving written record of his philosophy of art.⁷⁴ This text gives us a valuable glimpse into his artistic practice and the principles he felt should guide artistic vision. He refers during the lecture to Washington Allston, whose *Lectures on Art and Poetry* he owned.⁷⁵ Bannister would have developed his admiration for Allston during his Boston years. For Allston, the beloved and much praised Boston artist who died in 1843, objects observed were transformed by the artist's soul to approach an infinite harmony. This philosophy is echoed in Bannister's contention that great artists should attempt to "grasp the central spiritual idea of subjective truth involved in material being."⁷⁶

Bannister's belief that art should reveal "the absolute idea of perfect harmony" reflects a philosophy that had much in common with Transcendentalist thought. Ralph Waldo Emerson was a frequent lecturer and anti-slavery speaker in Boston, and Bannister could have read his "Thoughts on Art" or heard him speak.⁷⁷ In addition, Bannister was good friends with scientist and inventor William H. Channing, son of famed Transcendentalist William Emory Channing. Emerson's definition of the artist as interpreter of the ideal creations of the universal soul are reflected in Bannister's perception of himself as a spiritual conduit, delivering God's messages. Bannister evoked Emerson's contention that the artist must be subservient to God when he declared that he had laid upon the altar of art "all earthly hopes and aspirations,"⁷⁸ and that "with God's help . . . I hope to be able to deliver the messages instructed to me."⁷⁹

Untitled (Landscape with Man on a Horse), like other Bannister sunset studies, places man and animal in a reverent communication with God expressed through nature. Bannister's many landscapes with cattle may reflect not only his boyhood experiences watching the family cows and the influence of Barbizon School themes, but also the calm and harmonious relationship of animals in God's nature. His early *Herdsmen with Cows* or the 1880 *Untitled (Man on Horseback, Woman on Foot Driving Cattle)* reiterate the harmonious working between man and beast as an ideal union of God's creations.

Another motif found often in Bannister's paintings—among others, *Untitled (Woodcutter on a Path)* (1879), *The Eve-*

ning Track (1883), *Untitled (Girl in a Meadow)* (1884), *Road to a House with Red Roof* (1889)—is the winding road through the landscape, with the human traveler positioned as observer, one who passes through God's handiwork. Bannister identifies the artist's duty to represent "the beautiful phenomena of the heavens above, or the earth beneath them. . . . reading the great three leaved book of nature . . . land, and Sky, and water . . . reverently and lovingly. . . ."⁸⁰ Bannister's intellectual bent and deep religious principles created the philosophical underpinnings of his approach to the landscape. He was part of the tradition of artist-thinkers, among them Washington Allston and Asher B. Durand, who worked to clarify and verbalize their vision and practice of art.

Bannister's move to Providence reinforced his early exposure to the Barbizon School, whose works he had first encountered in Boston. As a young artist he probably saw two Barbizon exhibitions at the Boston Athenaeum in the 1850s.⁸¹ And he most certainly saw the 1866 and 1867 exhibitions at the Allston Club, held in the Studio Building's first floor, which showcased work by Millet, Gustave Courbet, Camille Corot, and their American pupils. Although public reception was still lukewarm, these pictures created a sensation among Boston artists.⁸² Bannister's drawing *Sowing Tares* was probably inspired by Millet's *The Sower*, which had been exhibited by the Allston Club.

In Providence, influential art dealer Seth Vose had been importing Barbizon paintings since the early 1850s. By the last twenty years of the nineteenth century, European Barbizon works dominated the collections of local patrons, and these works had a marked influence on the landscape style of Providence artists.⁸³

Certainly, in terms of thematic approach, Bannister felt a strong affinity for the Barbizon painters. Although the soft, atmospheric handling of works like *Hay Gatherers* (c. 1893; p. 55) recalls Corot's *River at Ville d'Avray* (c. 1871–73; Rhode Island School of Design), and *Seaweed Gatherers* (1898) is clearly a homage to Millet, Bannister did not so much appropriate this landscape style as share its poetic sensibility toward the landscape itself. His many pastoral landscapes, intimate and subjective renderings of animals and farmworkers in harmony with the landscape, reflect that sensibility. However, with so many Bannister paintings still unlocated, the fact that a number of extant Bannister paintings have thematic or stylistic connections to Barbizon may more



Fort Dumpling, Jamestown, Rhode Island

n.d.

Oil on canvas, 16 x 24 inches

Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Eric J.M. Godfrey



Jamestown, Rhode Island

1887

Oil on canvas, 13 x 24 inches

Collection of Dr. Harmon and Harriet Kelley



Untitled (Trees and Shrubbery)

1877

Oil on canvas, 10 x 13 1/4 inches

Collection of Allan S. Noonan, M.D.

Courtesy Wendell Street Gallery, Cambridge, Massachusetts



Train

c. 1875-80

Oil on canvas, 6¹/₈ x 8¹/₄ inches

National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Gift of Frederick and Joan Slatsky



The Mill in Knightsville

1896

Oil on canvas, 10 x 12½ inches

Collection of Joseph K. Ott

readily reflect which works patrons chose to buy and preserve than provide an overall representation of the body of his work. Bannister looked at everything, and appropriated what he needed. Reviewing his friend's career, John Arnold noted that although "his trend of mind and sympathies were all in [the Barbizon] direction," he "followed no master nor any school—nothing but his own instincts."⁸⁴

The demand for Bannister's work grew after his award at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition. By 1878, he was one of the original board members of the newly established Rhode Island School of Design. In that same year, Bannister, George Whitaker, and Charles Walter Stetson formed what was to become the Providence Art Club in order to create opportunities for exhibiting Providence artists and to bring together artists, art lovers, and patrons. Their first meeting of twelve artists was held in Bannister's studio, and by 1880 the club, grown in numbers and influence, was granted a charter.⁸⁵ The Art Club was central to the development of Providence's art community, with spring and autumn annual exhibitions, lectures on art, and social events for patrons and artists. Bannister often served on the executive committees as well as being a regular exhibitor.

The 1880s found Bannister a respected New England artist, with increasing prestige and patronage in White society, who remained a solid member of his African-American community and church. As in Boston, African-Americans patronized Bannister's work, and his paintings hung in the collections of John Hope, George Downing, and famed singer Madame Sissieretta Jones. Bannister's success was known to the larger African-American community as well. African-American artist and collector William Dorsey wrote about Bannister's and Lewis' successes at the 1876 Centennial Exposition.⁸⁶ An 1880 Philadelphia exhibition of works by African-American artists featured Bannister paintings, as well as those by Robert Scott Duncanson, Henry Ossawa Tanner, and others.⁸⁷

White businessmen and collectors Isaac Bates and Joseph Ely, leading Providence citizens, became Bannister's most enthusiastic patrons. The artist was receiving commissions from Boston collectors and art dealers as well and sending work to Connecticut exhibitions and New York's National Academy of Design. Bannister became a regular exhibitor with the Providence and Boston Art Clubs from 1880 on. He

planned a trip to Europe in 1881 but had to cancel when his financial backing fell through.⁸⁸ In 1881 and 1884 he won silver medals at the Boston Charitable Mechanics Association exhibitions, a popular annual juried event that attracted renowned artists from all over the country. In 1885, he exhibited *A New England Hillside* (whereabouts unknown) at the New Orleans Cotton Centennial Exposition. George Forbes reported that racist sentiment kept the painting off the printed exhibition checklist. Its presence in the exhibition was recorded by the newspaper *American Baptist*, which also stated its value, \$1,500.⁸⁹

Bannister purchased a sloop yacht, the *Fanchon*, in the 1880s and began a regular practice of spending summers sketching as he sailed between Providence and Newport and up to Bar Harbor, Maine. He would return to his studio in late summer with drawings, watercolors, and oil studies for his winter commissions. His surviving watercolors, such as the undated *Untitled (Landscape with Bridge)* (p. 35), *Untitled (Cove with House)*, and *Untitled* (Providence Athenaeum) reveal a sure and instinctively coloristic touch, and his handling of reflections on the water in these studies finds its apex in the oil paintings *Palmer River* (1885) and *Sunset* (c. 1875–80).

Although Bannister is principally known for his pastoral scenes of landscape and cattle, his nineteenth-century exhibition history reveals that he just as frequently painted views of the sea and Rhode Island coastline.⁹⁰ *Bath Road Cliff, Newport* (1889; p. 52) features a contemplative couple, perhaps the Bannisters, gazing at a rigged ship off in the distance. *Jamestown, Rhode Island* (1887; p. 41) and *Sabin Point, Narragansett Bay* (1885; p. 30) illustrate Bannister's lush and painterly rendition of dune grasses, sand and sea, where both dramatic sky and windswept beach are equally weighted in the composition. An untitled canvas of 1888 (p. 38), less narrative than many Bannister coastal scenes, is a remarkable abstract study of the effects of water spray against the rocky coastline. Many of the drawings and watercolors from Bannister's scrapbooks are studies of harbors and inland waterways, some featuring views of ships in the harbor that recall Luminist works in their stillness and measured compositional arrangements.

Bannister was a popular and influential teacher in Providence, and he served as mentor for younger artists such as Charles Walter Stetson. Stetson mentions Bannister frequently in his diaries, claiming that "He is my only confidant in Art matters & I am his. . . ."⁹¹ Providence landscape painter



Untitled (Plow in the Field)

1897

Oil on canvas, 11 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 17 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches

Collection of Dr. Harmon and Harriet Kelley



Farmer Green's Meadow

1886

Oil on canvas, 15 x 21 inches
Kenkeleba House, New York



Hauling Rails (Untitled [Boy and Man with Oxen])

1891

Oil on canvas, 40¹/₈ x 60¹/₄ inches

National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Gift of H. Alan and Melvin Frank

W. Alden Brown remembered his visits as a child to Bannister's studio, where Bannister showed him and his mother the large canvas *Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane* (whereabouts unknown), on which he had been working for a number of years. Brown became Bannister's student and he later recalled: "His was a mind far above the ordinary, and his art was in keeping with his brilliant mind. He was thoroughly conversant with the Bible, Shakespeare, English literature, classic themes and mythology."⁹²

In 1885, Bannister and other Providence Art Club members formed the Ann-Eliza Club, which seems to have functioned both as a forum for discussion of art issues and as a kind of men's club for Providence artists. Stetson and Whitaker were frequent speakers. Bannister, intellectually minded and well-read, participated in these forums. He acted as respondent to a Stetson lecture on the nude in art, and in his own 1886 lecture, "The Artist and His Critics," admonished art critics not to abuse their power and defined the "true artistic spirit" and the qualities the critic should consider in judging works of art. He was particularly harsh to critics of Millet, whom he called the "profoundest, most . . . spiritual artist of our time," and argued that Millet's mission was to "voice . . . the sad, uncomplaining life he saw about him—and with which he sympathized so deeply."⁹³

LAST YEARS

At the end of the 1880s, Bannister's career was still flourishing. His summer sketching seasons, studio commissions, and entries in the Providence Art Club exhibitions were reported in several Providence papers. In an 1888 letter to a Boston patron, he mentioned his current commissions for patrons in both Boston and Providence and his plans for a trip to New York.⁹⁴ His friend George Whitaker spoke warmly of such a trip, to visit an exhibition of Barbizon paintings. Whitaker remembered Bannister's enthusiastic critique of the works, which attracted the attention of a nearby gentleman, who turned out to be an officer of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Impressed with Bannister's artistic insights, he invited them to be his guests at the museum for the afternoon.⁹⁵

Although Bannister was a respected member of the Providence Art Club, exhibitions sponsored by the club in 1887

and 1893 must have troubled him deeply. Exhibited works in 1887 by Edward Kemble and W.L. Sheppard bore titles such as *The Mandingo*, *Barnyard Dance of the Negro*, and *Wat Dat?*, which suggest racist images of the African-American objectified as buffoon or exotic—images that were nonetheless still acceptable to many White Americans.⁹⁶ Bannister and his wife, both of whom fought for dignity and respect as African-Americans, would have been mortified to walk past such images in the club he helped found. The Bannisters had not ceased their work for the African-American community. Madame Carreaux, along with other African-American women of Providence, had been for some time seeking to establish a home for elderly Black women. She eventually enlisted the aid of several wealthy White citizens who donated land and money, and the Home for Aged Colored Women was officially opened in April 1890; it is known today as the Bannister Nursing Care Center. Reverend Mahlon Van Horne sat on the original board of directors, and the following year Bannister exhibited his *Christ Healing the Sick* (1864–90; whereabouts unknown) at the home, perhaps to help raise additional funds.⁹⁷

In 1891, Bannister had the largest show of his works, thirty-three in all, at the spring Providence Art Club exhibition. Also exhibited were paintings by Whitaker, Stetson, and J. Baxter. A reporter from the *Providence Daily Telegram*, which often gave Bannister favorable press exposure, visited his studio as he completed works for the show, and noted that this exhibition would be the first chance to see so many of his paintings together. Indeed, the show was something of a retrospective since the works spanned his career from 1869 to the present.⁹⁸

During the rest of the decade, however, Bannister's exhibition opportunities may have decreased. Indeed, after the 1891 exhibition, Bannister submitted fewer works each year and was mainly represented by his paintings owned by local patrons. Although his works did not suffer in quality even to his last years, age may have resulted in a diminished output. One wonders as well if the changing nature of the Providence Art Club, with its growing business and political membership, affected Bannister's opportunities for exhibition. Considering the club's exhibitions of works that contained racist imagery in the late 1880s, Bannister himself may have been less comfortable exhibiting there. All this may explain why, late in 1891, Whitaker made Bannister the subject of an Ann-Eliza evening, portraying him as a man of rare artistic vision who



People Near Boat

1893

Oil on canvas, 14 x 19⁷/₈ inches

National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Gift of Harvey Golden



Four Cows in a Meadow

1893

Oil on canvas, 12 x 19 inches

Newport Art Museum, Rhode Island; Extended loan from
Bannister Nursing Care Center



Bath Road Cliff, Newport

1889

Oil on canvas, 28 x 46 inches

Collection of Frederick G. and Marion E. Emerson

was underappreciated by his community. Whitaker asked: "Is it right that a man of such power should be allowed to slip through our community without due recognition?"⁹⁹

Two surviving works from 1893 document Bannister's continued inclusion of African-American subjects in his paintings. One, *People Near Boat* (p. 50), is a simple genre scene of two couples returning from a day on the water. The man at the left, facing the viewer, is clearly African-American and bears a remarkable resemblance to Bannister. The other work, *Hay Gatherers*, is an atmospheric depiction of African-American women and children harvesting and loading hay. Here Bannister returns to the depictions of farmworkers seen in his earliest landscapes, but now they are members of his own community. As in his Boston street urchin in the 1869 *Newspaper Boy*, Bannister records the daily lives of working-class Blacks in Rhode Island.

Bannister's palette grew progressively lighter toward the end of his career. Although he had announced his dislike of Impressionism to Stetson in the 1880s, his last works, among them the 1898 *Untitled (Rhode Island Landscape)*, indicate a willingness to experiment with a more abstract ordering of forms and color and an increasing attention to the textural qualities of paint. Paintings such as the 1897 *Untitled (Plow in the Field)* (p. 46) are lighter, less atmospheric studies of composition and color that recall Post-Impressionist developments in France. *Street Scene* (p. 56), completed in the late 1890s, is purely Impressionistic in both palette and stroke and represents a rare extant example of the cityscapes that were also part of Bannister's oeuvre. In *The Old Home* (1899; p. 54), Bannister uses a lighter palette and wider stroke to combine his narrative interest in leading the viewer through God's landscape with an abstract concern for shape, color, and texture.

Bannister's skills and vision as an artist continued to grow and develop in his last years. He finished two paintings the day before his death, one a landscape with cows, the other a scene at Knightsville. He had been complaining of heart trouble for some time, which some accounts attributed to an illness contracted during his work as a photographer in the 1860s. On the afternoon of January 9, 1901, he went walking and later announced his intention of attending an evening prayer meeting at the Elmwood Street Baptist Church, even though he was experiencing some distress. He attended the evening service and offered a prayer that touched those

around him, but then he sat down, gasping, and complained of dizziness. His last words were, "Jesus, help me"; he collapsed and was pronounced dead shortly thereafter.¹⁰⁰

Bannister's death brought a number of lengthy tributes and eulogies in local papers as well as in the national African-American press.¹⁰¹ In May 1901, his friends organized a memorial exhibition at the Providence Art Club that featured more than one hundred of his works, loaned by local patrons and friends. This exhibition was the subject of further tributes and extensive reviews, and the list of lenders included the leading citizens of Rhode Island's art and business worlds. Later that year, Bannister's artist friends formed a committee to erect a stone monument that still stands on his grave in North Burial Ground in Providence.

In late 1902, Christiana Carteaux Bannister, ill and unable to care for herself at home, was admitted to the State Hospital for the Insane, where she died in 1903. The disposition of her estate revealed only a few paintings and belongings valued at approximately one hundred dollars.¹⁰² The diminished fortunes suggested by this meager estate cannot be documented, but there are some indications that the Bannisters' last years were financially difficult. In 1898, Bannister had closed his Providence studio and the couple moved back to Boston. By 1900, however, they had returned to Providence. Had they been seeking better exhibition opportunities, which had been decreasing in Providence throughout the decade? Or was it simply that age had slowed down Bannister's productivity, making it impossible for him to earn an adequate living from his art? The fate of Christiana Carteaux Bannister's once-flourishing business enterprises is unknown.

Although Bannister has until now been viewed primarily as a Barbizon-influenced painter of pastoral landscapes, as we have seen, the range of his artistic production indicates more varied thematic and stylistic concerns. His portraits and religious works demonstrated a continuing interest in figural compositions, while his landscapes and marine views subordinate man and animal to an intimate and subjective interpretation of nature. A strong sense of compositional design endowed his paintings with a charged stillness of tremendous energy, and his best works combine a tactile exploration of paint with a reverent and poetic sensibility. He was a painter whose powerful spiritual convictions infused his views of nature with a pantheistic celebration of what he defined as the "infinite,



The Old Home

1899

Oil on canvas, 18 x 24 inches

Collection of Joseph K. Ott



Hay Gatherers

c. 1893

Oil on canvas, 18 x 24 inches

Collection of Norbert Fleisig, M.D.



Street Scene

late 1890s

Oil on canvas, 8⁹/₁₆ x 5¹/₄ inches

Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates

subtle qualities of the spiritual idea, centering in all created things. . . ."¹⁰³

Ultimately, any study of the art and the artist must encompass the man. Bannister never forgot that his financial and artistic successes were achieved in the face of a quotidian struggle against racism. "I have been sustained by an inborn love of art and accomplished all I have undertaken through the severest struggles which, while severe enough for white men, have been enhanced tenfold in my case."¹⁰⁴ Bannister believed that art was a moral power, and his identity as an African-American merged with his delight in knowledge and his love of art as a power for good. The body of his work stands on its own; his dedicated pursuit of dignity, freedom, and excellence lies at the heart of the African-American experience of the nineteenth century.

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1. George Whitaker, "Edward M. Bannister," undated typescript, p. 5, Edward Mitchell Bannister Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (henceforth EMB, AAA).

2. For the death date of Edward Bannister, Sr., see All Saints Anglican Church Records, *Register of Burials* 1816–1857 (microfilm), p. 48, Charlotte County Archives, St. Andrews, New Brunswick. William Wells Brown, *The Black Man: His Antecedents, His Genius, His Achievements* (1863; reprint New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), p. 214, reports that Bannister's father died when Edward, Jr., was six. No birth certificate has as yet been found for Edward Mitchell Bannister. Although his year of birth has been listed as 1828, the September 1850 Boston Census lists his age as twenty-three, which would push his birth date back to 1826 or 1827; Boston Census, 1850, 5th ward, microfilm, National Archives, Washington D.C., roll 335, p. 266. Further research is in progress.

3. Quoted in Whitaker, "Edward M. Bannister," p. 2.

4. "The Artist Bannister," *The New York Sunday Sun*, November 8, 1893 or 1898, EMB, AAA.

5. Lynda Roscoe Hartigan, *Sharing Traditions: Five Black Artists in Nineteenth-Century America*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1985), p. 71.

6. George W. Forbes, "Edward Mitchell Bannister with Sketches of Earlier Artists," undated typescript, p. 7, Rare Books and Manuscripts Department, Boston Public Library. Forbes was an African-American writer and assistant librarian at the Boston Public Library from 1897 to 1913, and he wrote a number of biographical essays on prominent African-Americans; see Hartigan, *Sharing Traditions*, p. 83 n. 8.

7. Juanita Marie Holland, *The Life and Work of Edward Mitchell Bannister (1828–1901): A Research Chronology and Exhibition Record* (New York: Kenkeleba House, 1992), p. 2.

8. Boston Census, 1850.

9. For a fuller discussion of Boston's African-American community before the Civil War, see James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *Black Bostonians: Family Life and Community Struggle in the Antebellum North* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1979).

10. Theodore J. Stebbins, "Introduction," in *The Boston Tradition: American Paintings from the Museum of Fine Arts*, exh. cat. (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1980), p. i.

11. Horton, *Black Bostonians*, pp. 67–68.

12. "The Artist Bannister"; Brown, *The Black Man*, p. 214.

13. Quoted in Horton, *Black Bostonians*, p. 60.

14. William J. Simmons, *Men of Mark: Eminent, Progressive and Rising* (1887; reprint New York: Arno Press, 1968), pp. 1130–31; "The Artist Bannister"; Brown, *The Black Man*, p. 215.

15. Ray Allen Billington, ed., *The Journal of Charlotte L. Forten* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1953), p. 58.

16. Christiana Carteaux (1822–1903) was a native of Rhode Island and was said to have both African-American and Narragansett Indian ancestry. Known professionally as Madame Carteaux, she was featured in an 1854 *Liberator* article on the most successful Black business people in Boston ("Business Enterprise of Colored People in Boston," *The Liberator*, January 27, 1854). Her hair salons, which sold her own cosmetics and hair preparations as well as styling services, were patronized by prominent and wealthy White women of Boston and Providence. Not content with financial success, she used her contacts with the White community to aid the abolitionist and community-service efforts of her African-American colleagues.

17. William Cooper Nell, *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolu-*

- tion (1855; reprint New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1968), p. 112.
18. Ibid., p. 318.
19. Forbes, "Edward Mitchell Bannister with Sketches of Earlier Artists," p. 9.
20. A number of drawings, part of a Bannister scrapbook once owned by the Providence Athenaeum, were documented in slides that were provided by Lawrence Sykes, Rhode Island College, Providence.
21. Nell, *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution*, p. 112. William Cooper Nell fought slavery and segregation throughout his life. In 1855, he was victorious in his long fight to desegregate Boston's schools, and he remained associated with important African-American political organizations and issues in Boston.
22. William H. Simpson, a successful African-American portraitist with commissions from Baltimore to Canada, participated in the social and political activities of the Black community. In 1853, George L. Ruffin was one of the first African-Americans to be admitted to the bar, and he became a prominent activist in Boston.
23. Jacob R. Andrews was a respected African-American painter and gilder, who created frames for Bannister's and Simpson's paintings in the 1850s and 1860s.
24. Forbes, "Edward Mitchell Bannister with Sketches of Earlier Artists," p. 8.
25. Quoted in "The Artist Bannister."
26. "Appeal of New York Negroes for Equal Suffrage Rights, 1869," in Herbert Aptheker, ed., *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States* (New York: Citadel Press, 1951), I, p. 456.
27. John S. Rock, "Address to a Meeting in Boston, 1858," in Thomas R. Frazier, ed., *Afro-American History: Primary Sources* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1971), p. 75.
28. Brown, *The Black Man*, p. 217.
29. Information concerning the Bannisters' residence at the home of Lewis Hayden courtesy of Dr. Adelaide Cromwell, who is researching and documenting African-Americans in Boston's West End in the nineteenth century.
30. *The Liberator* reported on several meetings in 1859 to raise funds and express support for fugitive-slave rescuers recently imprisoned in Ohio; see "Oberlin Rescuers," *The Liberator*, June 10, 1859, in C. Peter Ripley, ed., *Microfilm Edition of the Black Abolitionist Papers* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), roll 12, frame 785. Bannister's name, along with those of William Cooper Nell, Lewis Hayden, John S. Rock, J. Sella Martin, John V. Degrasse, William Wells Brown, and others, appears on a petition welcoming the Prince of Wales, as a representative of a country that had abolished slavery; "Address of Colored Citizens of Boston to the Prince of Wales," *The Liberator*, December 31, 1860, *Microfilm Edition*, reel 13, frame 85.
31. The Union Progressive Association was an organization of African-American leaders that included Charles Lenox Remond, William Wells Brown, William Cooper Nell, and Lewis Hayden.
32. Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the Civil War* (1953; 2nd ed. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), pp. 173-75.
33. Philip S. Foner and George E. Walker, *Proceedings of the Black National and State Conventions, 1865-1900* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), I, p. 205.
34. Cited in Billington, *The Journal of Charlotte L. Forten*, p. 242 n. 20. Bannister may have met Ball, who visited the home of Black abolitionist Charles Lenox Remond in 1854. Madame Carteaux was related to the Remonds by marriage.
35. Primus felt that Bannister was not helpful in opening doors to White patronage; see Holland, *The Life and Work of Edward Mitchell Bannister*, pp. 12-13.
36. Brown, *The Black Man*, pp. 214-17.
37. John Arnold, "Edward M. Bannister," *Providence Sunday Journal*, May 19, 1901, EMB, AAA.
38. See Sally Webster, *William Morris Hunt, 1824-1879* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 68.
39. Mrs. Charles Johnson, Jr., letter to Kenkeleba House, May 1992, reports that Bannister was asked to paint the recently deceased Mrs. Bell in her coffin. Evelina Johnson placed her mother's favorite white cap on the corpse; Bannister used Mrs. Bell's son as a model for the eyes.
40. "E.M. Bannister Portrait Painter," *The Liberator*, October 21, 1864, p. 171.
41. "Letter from Mrs. Child," *The Liberator*, November 18, 1864, describing her visit to the fair; Lydia Marie Child to Sarah Blake Sturgis Shaw, November 3, 1864, Lydia Marie Child Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University, bMS Am 1417 (92-95).
42. Child to Shaw, pp. 2-3.
43. Quoted in Fannie Barrier Williams, "A Great Artist in Silhouette: E.M. Bannister's Notable Career," *Chicago Times*, August 18, 1895, p. 36.
44. "Boston Artists' Picture Sale," *Daily Evening Transcript*, April 24, 1866; "Art Items," *Daily Evening Transcript*, March 5, 1866; clippings in the Bannister curatorial files, National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
45. Simmons, *Men of Mark*, p. 1129.
46. Horton, *Black Bostonians*, pp. 94-95; John Daniels, *In Freedom's*

Birthplace: A Study of the Boston Negroes (1914; reprint New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968), pp. 113–14.

47. William H. Robinson, "Blacks in Nineteenth-Century Rhode Island: An Overview," unpublished typescript, pp. 122, 151, Rhode Island Black Heritage Society, Providence.

48. See *Creative Survival: The Providence Black Community in the Nineteenth Century*, exh. cat. (Providence: Rhode Island Black Historical Society, 1984).

49. Robinson, "Blacks in Nineteenth-Century Rhode Island," pp. 125–26, 136ff., 144.

50. Robert G. Workman, "The Barbizon Spirit in Providence," in *The Spirit of Barbizon: France and America*, exh. cat. (Providence: Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, 1986), p. 52.

51. "Art and Artists: The Studios of Providence," *Providence Press*, October 26, 1869, John Russell Bartlett Scrapbooks, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence, pp. 219–27.

52. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Fugitive Slave Law," in Carl Bode and Malcolm Cowley, eds., *The Portable Emerson* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), p. 542.

53. See Lisa N. Peters, "Images of the Homeless in American Art, 1860–1910," in Rick Beard, ed., *On Being Homeless: Historical Perspectives*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of the City of New York, 1987), pp. 44–47.

54. Dore Ashton, *Rosa Bonheur: A Life and a Legend* (New York: The Viking Press, 1981), p. 89.

55. Peter Bermingham, *American Art in the Barbizon Mood*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1975), p. 74.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 166.

57. The identification of the subject as *Leucothea Rescuing Ulysses* was confirmed by George Stade, professor of English, Columbia University, New York.

58. For a chronological listing of Bannister's nineteenth-century exhibition submissions, see the Appendix to Holland, *The Life and Work of Edward Mitchell Bannister*.

59. Arnold, "Edward M. Bannister."

60. Quoted in Williams, "A Great Artist in Silhouette," p. 36.

61. Quoted in Whitaker, "Edward M. Bannister," p. 6.

62. Holland, *The Life and Work of Edward Mitchell Bannister*, p. 16.

63. See Carol Troyen, "The Boston Tradition: Painters and Patrons in Boston, 1720–1920," in *The Boston Tradition*, p. 25; the essay provides an excellent discussion of Boston's artists and art institutions during the nineteenth century.

64. "Providence Studios," *Providence Sunday Journal*, April 17, 1887, p. 8.

65. This was a preliminary exhibition of the group of works by Massachusetts artists that was to be sent to the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition.

66. "Art and the Artists: The Centennial Exhibition," *Daily Evening Traveller*, April 6, 1876, p. 1.

67. *Under the Oaks* had been sold to a Mr. John Duff of Boston for \$1,500 before being sent to Philadelphia. The painting has been lost since Duff's death, when it was stored in New York City during the probate of his will.

68. Recorded in Whitaker, "Edward M. Bannister," pp. 4–5.

69. Robert Douglass, Jr., in *A.M.E. Christian Recorder*, October 26, 1876, typescript of review, Kenkeleba House, New York.

70. J.P. Sampson, in *A.M.E. Christian Recorder*, October 8, 1876, typescript of review, Kenkeleba House, New York.

71. Hartigan, *Sharing Traditions*, reprod. p. 71.

72. Quoted in Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture: American Landscape Painting 1825–1875* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 247.

73. Edward M. Bannister, "The Artist and His Critics," April 15, 1886, pp. 4–5, Ann-Eliza Club Papers, Manuscripts Division, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence.

74. *Ibid.*

75. Washington Allston, *Lectures on Art and Poetry*, Richard H. Dana, Jr., ed. (New York: Baker and Scriber, 1850). This volume and four other books from Bannister's library are owned by Daniel Mechnig, Providence.

76. Bannister, "The Artist and His Critics," p. 21.

77. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Thoughts on Art," *The Dial*, 1 (January 1841).

78. Bannister, "The Artist and His Critics," p. 31.

79. Whitaker, "Edward M. Bannister," p. 6.

80. Bannister, "The Artist and His Critics," pp. 25–26.

81. *Harvesters Resting*, the first painting exhibited in the United States by French Barbizon artist Jean-François Millet, was shown at the Athenaeum in 1854; four years later the first major exhibition of French Barbizon painters and students opened there; see Troyen, "The Boston Tradition," p. 23, and Workman, "The Barbizon Spirit in Providence," p. 50.

82. See Arnold, "Edward M. Bannister," and Troyen, "The Boston Tradition," pp. 25–26.

83. For an excellent discussion of Barbizon art in Providence, see Workman, "The Barbizon Spirit in Providence."
84. Arnold, "Edward M. Bannister."
85. George Leland Miner, *Angell's Lane: The History of a Little Street in Providence* (Providence: Ackerman-Standard Press, 1948), pp. 127-28.
86. Roger Lane, *William Dorsey's Philadelphia and Ours* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 123.
87. "Our Art Exhibition," *The People's Advocate*, October 28, 1880.
88. Mary Armfield Hill, *Endure: The Diaries of Charles Walter Stetson* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985), p. 11.
89. Forbes, "Edward Mitchell Bannister," p. 11, and Simmons, *Men of Mark*, p. 1130.
90. See the Appendix to Holland, *The Life and Work of Edward Mitchell Bannister*.
91. Hill, *Endure*, p. 11.
92. W. Alden Brown, "Edward Mitchell Bannister," unpublished typescript, W. Alden Brown Papers, Manuscripts Division, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence.
93. Bannister, "The Artist and His Critics," p. 21.
94. Bannister to C.H. Brainerd (?), April 8, 1880, Rare Books and Manuscripts Department, Boston Public Library.
95. Whitaker, "Edward M. Bannister," p. 3.
96. "Exhibit of Black and White Drawings, Loaned by the Century Company," October 24, 1887; Providence Art Club exhibition files.
97. Information furnished by Edward A. Giarusso.
98. Untitled newspaper clipping, *Sunday Telegram*, October 18, 1891, EMB, AAA; "As Good As Any," *Sunday Telegram*, November 1, 1891.
99. George Whitaker, "One of Our Laureates," transcript of talk, December 1891, Ann-Eliza Club Papers, Manuscripts Division, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence.
100. For Bannister's illness and death, see "Artist Dies with Prayer on His Lips," *Providence Press*, January 10, 1901, and "Died in Church," *Providence Journal*, January 11, 1901, EMB, AAA.
101. "A Great Painter," *The Colored American* [Washington, D.C.], May 25, 1901, p. 6.
102. "Died at Age of 80: Mrs. Christina [sic] Carteaux, Widow of Artist Bannister," *Providence Journal*, January 1, 1903, p. 9.
103. Bannister, "The Artist and His Critics," pp. 4-5.
104. Quoted in Simmons, *Men of Mark*, p. 1129.



The Woodsman

1885

Graphite on paper, 20½ x 14¾ inches

Providence Art Club, Rhode Island

Bequest of Ruth Ely



Untitled (Rhode Island Coast)

n.d.

Watercolor on paper, 12 x 17 inches

Kenkeleba House, New York



Untitled (Log on Beach)

n.d.

Watercolor on paper, 6 x 9½ inches

Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans



Untitled (Dock and Water)

n.d.

Watercolor on paper, 6 x 9½ inches

Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans



Untitled (Landscape with Cows)

n.d.

Graphite and pastel on paper, 4½ x 7¼ inches

The Museum of the National Center of Afro-American Artists, Boston



Untitled (Oxen and Cart with Figures)

n.d.

Graphite on paper, 5⅞ x 9½ inches

The Museum of the National Center of Afro-American Artists, Boston



Untitled (Landscape, Woods)

n.d.

Graphite on paper, 6½ x 10 inches

Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans



Untitled (Oak Trees)

n.d.

Graphite on paper, 6 1/4 x 9 1/4 inches

Collection of Mr. and Mrs. David C. Driskell

CHRONOLOGY

This chronology is a reduced version of the comprehensive text published in Juanita Marie Holland, *The Life and Work of Edward Mitchell Bannister: A Research Chronology and Exhibition Record* (New York: Kenkeleba House, 1992). All sources for the information presented here can be found in that publication, with the exception of some corrected or additional data concerning Bannister's birthdate, early history, and abolitionist activities, which have been provided by the author for the Whitney Museum catalogue.

1826/27-48

Edward Mitchell Bannister, the oldest son of Hannah and Edward Bannister, was born around 1826-1827 in St. Andrews, a small seaport on the Atlantic Ocean, at the mouth of the St. Croix River in New Brunswick, Canada. His father, who may have been a native of Barbados, died in 1832.

By age ten, Edward's drawings of schoolmates and neighbors were being praised by the community.

After receiving a good elementary education, he was apprenticed to a successful cobbler, although his family and friends expected he would eventually become an artist. When his mother died in 1844, he and his younger brother, William, were sent to live and work on the nearby farm of Harris Hatch, a prominent and wealthy lawyer from Boston.

1848-50

Bannister worked on ships along the coast of New Brunswick, then decided to come to the United States; he arrived in Boston sometime before 1850.

1850

Edward and William Bannister are listed as hairdressers in the Boston Census.

1852

William Banister [*sic*] is listed as a hairdresser in the Boston city directory.

1853

Appeared for the first time in Boston's city directory as Edwin M. Bannister, working as a hairdresser in the salon of successful Black businesswoman Christiana Carteaux at 191 Washington Street. (He is referred to as Edward or Edwin in a number of sources throughout his life; also known as Ned.)

1854

Still listed his trade as hairdresser at the same address.

Received his first commission, painting *The Ship Outward Bound* for distinguished Black physician Dr. John V. DeGrasse. Bannister's colleague, African-American gilder and painter Jacob R. Andrews, created an elaborate gilt frame for the work, which the doctor hung in a place of honor in his study.

1855

Working as a barber at 190 Commercial Street. William Cooper Nell, an ardent abolitionist and author, wrote the first published recognition of Bannister as a rising young artist in *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution*. He described *The Ship Outward Bound* and noted that Bannister was winning local recognition for his crayon portraits as well.

In the mid-1850s, lived and worked in close proximity to other Black artists in Boston and deepened his associations with prominent members of the Black community. Sang with the Crispus Attucks Choir, which performed anti-slavery songs at events in the community, and joined the Histrionic Club.



Bannister in Providence

1856

Not listed in the Boston city directory in business or residence sections.

1857

Not listed in the Boston city directory. Appeared in productions of the Histrionic Club, and sang with Crispus Attucks Choir.

Married Christiana Carteaux on June 10 at Boston's Temple Street Episcopal Church.

1858

No longer dependent on the barber's trade, he declared his profession as artist, living at 170 Cambridge Street.

Served as secretary to Colored Citizens of Boston and signed an abolitionist petition published in *The Liberator*.

1859-60

Placed a business listing in the Boston city directory for the first time, identifying himself as a portrait painter. His studio and his wife's hair salon address were at the same location, 323 Washington Street.

The Bannisters resided at 66 Southac Street, also the home of Lewis Hayden, a leader in the militant resistance to the return of fugitive slaves. Hayden's home was a stop on the Underground Railroad and a gathering place for abolitionist leaders.

1861-62

Bannisters moved to 28 Grove Street, with her salon and his studio now at 31 Winter Street. F.L. Lay's successful daguerreotype business, located in the same building, may have prompted Bannister to pursue photography as a career.

Studied and worked in New York for a year for an unidentified photographer. In 1862 listed his Boston residence at 31 Winter Street, but no longer had a studio or listed himself as a portrait painter.

1863

As recording secretary of the Union Progressive Association, recorded the stirring speeches welcoming the Emancipation

Proclamation by William Wells Brown, William Cooper Nell, Frederick Douglass, and many others on January 1, 1863.

Continued to win renown in the African-American community as a painter. His artistic career and political involvement described in Brown, *The Black Man: His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements*, a compilation of biographical essays on prominent African-American men and women.

The 54th Colored Regiment, the first Black regiment raised in the northeast, marched out of Boston on May 18, 1863. Christiana Carteaux Bannister, as president of the Colored Ladies Relief Society, probably presented the state flag to Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, the White officer chosen to lead the regiment.

Reappeared in the business section of the Boston city directory as a "photographist," working at 210 Washington Street.

Advertised as a photographer and daguerreotypist in 1863 (and 1864).

Began his only formal artistic training, with Dr. William Rimmer, a physician and sculptor also located in the Studio Building. He studied in the evening life-drawing classes that Rimmer conducted at the Lowell Institute between 1863 and 1865.

1864

Christiana Bannister, known in the community as Madame Carteaux, was instrumental in organizing a fair to raise funds to aid the widows and orphans of Black soldiers wounded or killed in battle. As president of the Colored Ladies Sanitation Commission, she also mobilized White abolitionists and wealthy sympathizers in Boston to donate articles to be sold or raffled at the fair. Bannister donated a full-length portrait he had painted of Robert Gould Shaw.

Still listing his profession as "photographist," he also advertised as a portrait painter located at the Studio Building, 110 Tremont Street.

Reverend Robert Johnson and his wife, Evelina, African-American activists and friends of William Lloyd Garrison, commissioned Bannister to do a memorial portrait of Mrs. Johnson's mother, Prudence Nelson Bell. This represents Bannister's only extant work from 1864.

Francis Bicknell Carpenter's famous painting, *The Emancipation Proclamation Before the Cabinet* was shown to great acclaim in Boston in December. Sometime before 1869, Bannister and Carpenter met in New York or Boston. Bannister showed him his *Jesus Led to Caiaphas* which Carpenter praised, urging Bannister to devote himself to painting.

1865

Still at the Studio Building, changed his business listing from "photographist" to "artist." Met a young African-American artist from Connecticut named Nelson Primus.

Helped raise funds at the Convention of the Colored People of New England in December.

1866

Moved to 50 Northfield Street. Madame Carteaux still had her home and business at 12 Winter Street. Bannister's business directory listing described him as a portrait painter at the Studio Building, and he began to receive attention from the larger Boston press. His work was included in an auction of paintings by Boston artists at Williams & Everett's Gallery.

1867

Still living at same address, but had no business listing this year; Madame Carteaux had no listing in either the business or residence sections of the Boston city directory.

1868

Entered a one-year partnership at 228 Washington Street with artist Asa R. Lewis. As part of "Bannister & Lewis," he advertised as a portrait and landscape painter.

It is possible that the Bannisters separated. Bannister listed in Boston city directory as still living at 50 Northfield Street; Madame Carteaux again listed her business and residence at 43 Winter Street.

1869

The Bannisters listed as living together in a house in Hyde Park. Bannister's studio was still at 228 Washington Street.

By October 1869 the Bannisters had moved to Providence, to a house at 7 America Street, with his studio at 67 Dorrance.

Madame Carteaux continued to operate a salon in Boston through 1872.

Bannister was immediately noticed by the local press when he exhibited a portrait of William Lloyd Garrison and a painting entitled *Newspaper Boy*. Also noted was his recently painted *June Day in the Woods* and the fact that he had begun work on several pastoral landscapes. This article places Bannister firmly within the community of Providence artists, along with Tom Robinson, Edward Leavitt, John Arnold, Frederick S. Batcheller, and James Lincoln.

Among his important patrons in the African-American community were the wealthy businessman and activist George Downing, Jr., John Hope, the second Black graduate of Brown University, and famed singer Sissieretta Jones, all of whom owned Bannister paintings.

1870

Bannisters now lived at 14 Westminster, house 6B. Madame Carteaux listed her business as "Hair Doctress," at 5 Burrill Street, while Bannister listed his studio, room 12 at the Mercantile National Bank Building, under "Portrait and Landscape Painters."

1871

Madame Carteaux moved her business to 224 Westminster Street.

1872

From 1872 through 1874, listed as a portrait painter in the residence directory, and under "Portrait and Landscape Painters" in the business section.

Bannisters moved to 37 Swan Street; he had a studio in the Woods Building at 2 College Street. His work began to win greater acclaim on the Providence art scene.

Submitted a painting entitled *Landscape* to the Boston Art Club exhibition and won an award of premium at the Rhode Island Industrial Exhibition for *Summer Afternoon*.

1874

Bannisters moved to a house at 67 Cushing Street, and William Bannister listed his address at 85 Vinton Street. Madame

Carteaux is not listed in either residence or business sections of the Providence city directory this year or in any of the next eight years.

1875

Described himself as "artist" in the residence directory, and listed his studio at 2 College Street.

1876

Moved his studio to the fifth floor of the Butler Exchange. In April, his landscape *Under the Oaks* was exhibited as part of the Massachusetts Centennial Art Exhibition at the Boston Art Club.

Under the Oaks wins one of four first prize medals at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition. The national attention Bannister received added greatly to his stature as an artist, and the demand for his work grew.

1877

Studio at the Woods Building, 2 College Street, was identified in the Providence city directory as room 50.

1878

Exhibited a landscape at the Boston Art Club exhibition, and won a bronze medal for *Across the Marsh* at the 1878 Charitable Mechanics Association Exhibition.

Rhode Island School of Design established with funds left over from the Centennial Committee. Bannister, the nationally acclaimed Centennial award winner, was on the original board of directors.

Bannister, George Whitaker, and Charles Walter Stetson formed what was to become the Providence Art Club.

1879

Exhibited a landscape at the Boston Art Club. Sent a painting, *The Storm*, to the National Academy of Design exhibition, New York, in March.

Completed a commissioned landscape of a twilight scene for Edward Motley of Boston and was at work on a large study of

autumn leaves that was to be sent to “an extensive art dealer in one of the large cities.”

Donated *Cows in the Marsh* and two smaller landscapes to a benefit to raise funds for the Greenwich Street Baptist Church.

1880

Enjoyed increasing artistic acclaim in the New England arts community. *Landscape*, purchased by Providence businessman and collector Isaac Comstock Bates, was favorably reviewed when exhibited as part of a loan exhibition in aid of the First Light Infantry.

The Providence Art Club was officially chartered in February, with artist James Lincoln as president. Bannister was on the executive committee that organized the Art Club's first exhibition in May. He submitted seven paintings; his friends and fellow artists George Whitaker, Charles Walter Stetson, and Sydney Burleigh also participated in the exhibition of 166 oil paintings and more than a hundred graphic works. At the Art Club's second show in December, Bannister was represented by four oils and three drawings.

1881

Continued to be a regular contributor to the Boston Art Club exhibitions. The Massachusetts Charitable Mechanics Association awarded him a silver medal for *The Hillside Pasture*.

Submitted *Noon* and *Ox Team, A Study* to the Providence Art Club spring exhibition, which included 185 works from local artists. Showed four paintings and one watercolor in the Providence Art Club autumn exhibition.

At work on a painting depicting Herodias contemplating the head of John the Baptist.

1882

Exhibited five paintings at the Providence Art Club exhibition; also in this show were Thomas Eakins, Thomas Anschutz, William Merritt Chase, and Albert Pinkham Ryder.

Participated in a Providence Art Club auction to raise money for the children of a deceased colleague. Businessman Isaac Comstock Bates, one of Bannister's earliest patrons, donated four works, Bannister two.



Studio Building, Boston, where Bannister maintained a studio, c. 1864–69



Wood's Building at 2 College Street,
Providence, Rhode Island, where Bannister
maintained a studio, 1872-98

Exhibited *Evening*, priced at \$100, at the 1882 Boston Art Club exhibition.

1883

Exhibited several landscapes at the Providence Art Club. Submitted one work, a landscape, to the Boston Art Club spring exhibition. Exhibited in Hartford, Connecticut, in a December exhibition of seventy-five Connecticut artists, identified in the local papers as "The Artists' Exhibition".

Madame Carteaux began to advertise again as a "hair doctress," working at 243 Westminster.

1884

The Bannisters moved to 93 Benevolent Street (until 1898).

A large exhibition of Jean-François Millet's etchings opened at the Providence Art Club. Bannister submitted three works to the autumn Providence Art Club exhibition. *A New England Hillside* won a silver medal at the fifteenth Exhibition of the Charitable Mechanics Association, a respected juried exhibition, with artists from all over the country submitting works. Bannister's painting was listed for sale at \$800.

1885

Continued to exhibit with the Providence Art Club. Sent *A New England Hillside* to the Cotton Centennial Exposition in New Orleans. Participated in the 1885 Rhode Island School of Design Meritorious Exhibition of American artists.

Bannister and other Art Club members formed the Ann-Eliza Club, which seems to have functioned both as a forum for serious discussion of art issues and as a men's social club for Providence artists.

1886

Received an important commission from respected Rhode Island inventor George Corliss and contributed to the Boston and Providence Art Club shows. Served on the general committee of the Providence Art Club and was an active member at the Ann-Eliza Club evenings.

Gave a lecture at the Ann-Eliza Club, "The Artist and His Critics," in which he rather tartly discussed the responsibilities of critics toward artists and the public.

Spent the summer aboard his yacht *Fanchon*, sailing on Narragansett Bay between Providence and Newport and creating studies and sketches that would provide material for his winter studio commissions. These activities reported in the local newspapers.

1887

Exhibited four works at Providence's Leith and Danforth Gallery and participated in the spring and fall Providence Art Club exhibitions.

1888

Participated in the Providence Art Club spring and fall exhibitions and served on the exhibition committee.

Continued to receive important commissions from his patrons. Judge Carpenter commissioned what may have been a nautical work entitled *Blow, High, Blow*.

Had ten works in a sale of 125 paintings by Providence artists at Leonard & Co., Boston.

1889

The spring Providence Art Club exhibition featured works by Boston and New York artists, as well as by Bannister and his Providence colleagues. Showed two works in both the spring and fall exhibitions.

Around this time, four of his biblical paintings were purchased by a Roman Catholic church in Providence.

Received much favorable notice in the local papers, which discussed his work and reviewed his exhibitions.

1890

Trip to New York City to see an important exhibition of Barbizon paintings.

Work as a teacher mentioned in the local press; his Saturday classes are filled with the sons and daughters of Rhode Island's wealthiest families.

"Art Notes," a weekly feature of the *Providence Sunday Journal*, reported that Bannister was contemplating the sale of his yacht.

The Home for Aged Colored Women, established in large part by Mrs. Bannister, opened in April. A year later, Bannister exhibited *Christ Healing the Sick* at the home. Exhibited a landscape at the Boston Art Club. Submitted two works to the spring exhibition at the Providence Art Club.

1891

Spent part of summer sketching in Bar Harbor, Maine, and worked in watercolors on sketches of the Narragansett boat-house and scenes around Newport. Completed three oil paintings from the Bar Harbor sketches.

In a group exhibition at the Providence Art Club, Bannister showed thirty-three works, dating as early as 1869, to much acclaim. Only seven of those works were from his own collection; all the rest came from his many local patrons.

Providence Art Institute, formed with the intention of eventually providing Providence with its own museum of art, held its first exhibition of 190 works loaned by leading citizens; Bannister submitted one painting. Also exhibited eighteen watercolors and drawings in a Providence Art Club exhibition. All these works were owned by Providence collectors George Buffum, George Whitaker, and J.C. Ely.

Submitted a landscape to the First Annual Exhibition of American Art at the Detroit Museum of Art (now The Detroit Institute of Arts).

George Whitaker spoke about Bannister in an address to the Ann-Eliza Club entitled "One of Our Laureates," in which he praised Bannister's career and vision, yet lamented that the artist was not sufficiently appreciated.

1892

Seventeen works exhibited in a summer exhibition at the Providence Art Club; all works loaned by his patrons Judge Carpenter, George Whitaker, Dr. Harris, or J.C. Ely.

A reporter's visit to Bannister's studio in October revealed many pencil sketches and watercolors executed during the previous summer in Newport. Finished a painting entitled *The Return of the Fisherman* and was busy at work on a large composition depicting the descent of Ulysses into Hades. Other charcoal sketches hung on the studio walls depicted scenes from Spencer's *Faerie Queene*.

Prepared to submit a landscape view of Warwick looking toward East Greenwich to the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, but apparently changed his mind when informed that all works had first to be juried in Boston.

1893

Submitted two works to the Providence Art Club's autumn exhibition.

1894

Was not among the exhibitors in the Providence Art Club's spring exhibition. An October exhibition of Mr. Robert P. Brown's collection, however, featured five paintings. Submitted one work to the autumn Providence Art Club exhibition.

1895

There are no records of his participation in the Providence Art Club exhibitions this year.

1896

Showed two works in the 100th exhibition of the Providence Art Club: *Summer Afternoon* and a loaned work entitled *Evening*.

1898

Summer Afternoon was again exhibited in the annual Providence Art Club exhibition, along with *Carton Marshes*.

Studio is listed at 47 Woods Building. In July the *Providence Journal* reported that Bannister had moved to Boston and was opening a studio there.

1899

Providence city directory lists Bannister as "removed to Boston, Mass."

Showed *A Hillside Pasture*, priced at \$50, at the spring Providence Art Club exhibition. Lists his address in the exhibition catalogue as 381 Northampton Street in Boston.

1900

Returned to Providence and resided with his wife at 60 Wilson Street.

Does not participate in the Providence Art Club exhibitions this year.

1901

On January 9, suffered a fatal heart attack while attending a prayer meeting at the Elmwood Street Baptist Church. Was the subject of detailed tributes in a number of local papers and was eulogized by artists and friends George Whitaker and John Arnold.

In May his friends in the Providence Art Club organized a memorial exhibition with 101 of his works, which generated further tributes and lengthy reviews in the press. Later that year, a stone monument was erected on his grave in North Burial Ground by a committee of artist friends.

1902-03

Christiana Carteaux Bannister became ill late in 1902. She was sent to the State Hospital for the Insane, where she died, age eighty-three, on January 1, 1903.



Bannister's sloop yacht, *Fanchon*, 1880s



Judge George Newman Bliss and *Fanchon*,
which he purchased from Bannister

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Dimensions are in inches; height precedes width.

Untitled (Rhode Island Seascape), c. 1856

Oil on canvas, 7¹/₄ x 13¹/₂

Kenkeleba House, New York

Prudence Nelson Bell, 1864

Oil on canvas, 25 x 21

Collection of Mrs. Charles W. Johnson, Jr.

Untitled (Moon over Harbor), c. 1868

Oil on fiberboard, 9⁵/₈ x 15¹/₄

National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution,
Washington, D.C.; Gift of H. Alan and Melvin Frank

Governor Sprague's White Horse, 1869

Oil on canvas, 23 x 30

Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence

Herdsman with Cows, 1869

Oil on canvas, 31¹/₄ x 51¹/₂

National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution,
Washington, D.C.; Gift of Harry Leven

Untitled (Man with Two Oxen), 1869

Oil on canvas, 16 x 24¹/₄

National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution,
Washington, D.C.; Gift of Dr. Peter A. Pizzarello

Scene Along the Connecticut River, Westmoreland, c. 1870

Oil on canvas, 20 x 30

Harvard Musical Association, Boston

Sunny Landscape, c. 1870

Oil on canvas, 22 x 36

Bomani Gallery, San Francisco

Sunset, c. 1875-80

Oil on canvas, 20¹/₄ x 28¹/₈

National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution,
Washington, D.C.; Gift of Elliot and Rhoda Liffland

Train, c. 1875-80

Oil on canvas, 6¹/₈ x 8¹/₄

National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution,
Washington, D.C.; Gift of Frederick and Joan Slatsky

Hillside Pasture, 1877

Oil on canvas mounted on board, 20 x 30

New Jersey State Museum, Trenton; Gift of the Friends of the
New Jersey State Museum

The Palmer River, Rebooth, Massachusetts, 1877

Oil on fiberboard, 14¹⁵/₁₆ x 10¹/₈

Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence;
Bequest of Isaac C. Bates

Untitled (Trees and Shrubbery), 1877

Oil on canvas, 10 x 13¹/₄

Collection of Allan S. Noonan, M.D.; courtesy Wendell Street
Gallery, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Untitled (Landscape with Moored Boat), 1879

Oil on canvas, 14 x 20

National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution,
Washington, D.C.; Gift of Joseph Sinclair

Untitled (Woodcutter on a Path), 1879

Oil on canvas, 16 x 22

National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution,
Washington, D.C.; Gift of Louis Glaser

At the Oakside Beach, late 1870s

Oil on canvas, 8¹/₂ x 12¹/₂

Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence;
Bequest of Isaac C. Bates

Untitled, late 1870s

Oil on canvas, 12 1/2 x 20 1/2

Collection of Mr. and Mrs. E. Thomas Williams, Jr.

Woman on a Road Near a Stream, late 1870s

Oil on canvas, 15 1/2 x 21 1/2

Collection of Judge Frederick L. Brown; courtesy Wendell Street Gallery, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Untitled (Man on Horseback, Woman on Foot Driving Cattle), 1880

Oil on canvas, 16 1/8 x 22 1/8

National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; Gift of H. Alan and Melvin Frank

Walking Along a Path, c. 1880

Oil on canvas, 5 3/4 x 9 1/2

Collection of Judge Frederick L. Brown; courtesy Wendell Street Gallery, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Kid's Road, 1880s

Oil on canvas, 5 x 8

Collection of Warren and Charlynn Goins

Landscape, Clouds, 1880s

Oil on canvas, 5 x 8

Collection of Warren and Charlynn Goins

Untitled (Landscape with Waterfall), 1880s

Oil on canvas, 24 x 36

Private collection

Last Glow, 1881

Oil on burlap, 28 1/4 x 36

The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Art and Artifacts Division; The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundation

Untitled (Cows Descending Hillside), 1881

Oil on burlap, 11 1/8 x 15

National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; Gift of Louis Glaser

The Evening Track, 1883

Oil on canvas, 9 x 13

Collection of Dr. Gregory Wells and Dr. Sheila Allison-Wells

Summer Meadow, 1883

Oil on canvas, 9 x 12

Collection of Dr. Gregory Wells and Dr. Sheila Allison-Wells

Untitled (Girl in a Meadow), 1884

Oil on canvas, 18 x 26

Collection of Francis and Patricia Scola

Untitled (Landscape with Man on Horse), 1884

Oil on canvas, 26 1/8 x 40 1/8

National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; Gift of Irwin M. Sparr

Palmer River, 1885

Oil on canvas, 24 x 34

Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Daniel R. Mechnig

Sabin Point, Narragansett Bay, 1885

Oil on canvas, 37 1/4 x 64 1/4

Brown University, Gardner House, Providence, Rhode Island; Bequest of Dr. and Mrs. George W. Gardner

The Woodsman, 1885

Graphite on paper, 20 1/2 x 14 3/4

Providence Art Club, Rhode Island; Bequest of Ruth Ely

Farmer Green's Meadow, 1886

Oil on canvas, 15 x 21

Kenkeleba House, New York

Jamestown, Rhode Island, 1887

Oil on canvas, 13 x 24

Collection of Dr. Harmon and Harriet Kelley

Untitled, 1888

Oil on canvas, 16 x 24

Kenkeleba House, New York

Bath Road Cliff, Newport, 1889

Oil on canvas, 28 x 46

Collection of Frederick G. and Marion E. Emerson

Road to a House with Red Roof, 1889

Oil on canvas, 16 1/2 x 24

Newport Art Museum, Rhode Island; Extended loan from Bannister Nursing Care Center

Untitled (Woman at the Well), 1890
Graphite and pastel on paper, 19³/₄ x 15
Collection of Allan S. Noonan, M.D.; courtesy Wendell Street
Gallery, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Hauling Rails (Untitled [Boy and Man with Oxen]), 1891
Oil on canvas, 40¹/₈ x 60¹/₄
National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution,
Washington, D.C.; Gift of H. Alan and Melvin Frank

Leucothea Rescuing Ulysses, 1891
Oil on canvas, 9 x 12
Newport Hospital, Rhode Island

Four Cows in a Meadow, 1893
Oil on canvas, 12 x 19
Newport Art Museum, Rhode Island; Extended loan from Bannister
Nursing Care Center

People Near Boat, 1893
Oil on canvas, 14 x 19⁷/₈
National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution,
Washington, D.C.; Gift of Harvey Golden

Untitled (Forest Scene), 1893
Oil on canvas, 14 x 20
National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution,
Washington, D.C.; Gift of Michael Marks

Untitled (Shoreline with Sailboats and Roof), 1893
Oil on canvas, 14 x 24
National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution,
Washington, D.C.; Gift of Joseph Sinclair

Hay Gatherers, c. 1893
Oil on canvas, 18 x 24
Collection of Norbert Fleisig, M.D.

At the Pawtuxet (By the Brook), 1895
Oil on canvas, 15 x 18
Providence Art Club, Rhode Island; Gift of Mrs. James Elgan

The Mill in Knightsville, 1896
Oil on canvas, 10 x 12¹/₂
Collection of Joseph K. Ott

Untitled (Plow in the Field), 1897
Oil on canvas, 11¹/₄ x 17¹/₂
Collection of Dr. Harmon and Harriet Kelley

Seaweed Gatherers, 1898
Oil on canvas, 24 x 19⁷/₈
National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution,
Washington, D.C.; Gift of H. Alan and Melvin Frank

Untitled (Rhode Island Landscape), 1898
Oil on canvas, 18 x 22
Kenkeleba House, New York

The Old Home, 1899
Oil on canvas, 18 x 24
Collection of Joseph K. Ott

Untitled (Landscape), 1899
Oil on canvas, 14 x 20
National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution,
Washington, D.C.

Street Scene, late 1890s
Oil on canvas, 8⁹/₁₆ x 5³/₄
Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence;
Bequest of Isaac C. Bates

Buttonwood Cove, n.d.
Watercolor on paper, 7 x 10³/₄
Providence Athenaeum, Rhode Island

Christiana Carteaux Bannister, n.d.
Oil on canvas, 35¹/₂ x 28
Newport Art Museum, Rhode Island; Extended loan from Bannister
Nursing Care Center

Fort Dumpling, Jamestown, Rhode Island, n.d.
Oil on canvas, 16 x 24
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Eric J.M. Godfrey

Portrait of Judith, n.d.
Oil on board, 17¹/₂ x 11¹/₄
Providence Art Club, Rhode Island; Gift of Maxwell Mays

Saint Luke, n.d.
Oil on canvas, 24¹/₄ x 18¹/₈
National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution,
Washington, D.C.; Gift of Alan M. Gilstein and William J. Piccerelli

Untitled, n.d.
Ink on paper, 7 x 9³/₄
Providence Athenaeum, Rhode Island

Untitled, n.d.
Watercolor and graphite on paper, 19¹/₂ x 15¹/₄
Providence Art Club, Rhode Island

Untitled, n.d.
Watercolor on paper, 7 x 10¹/₄
Providence Athenaeum, Rhode Island

Untitled (Bass Rock), n.d.
Oil on canvas, 10 x 14
Kenkeleba House, New York

Untitled (Cove with House), n.d.
Watercolor on paper, 6 x 9¹/₂
Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans

Untitled (Dock and Water), n.d.
Watercolor on paper, 6 x 9¹/₂
Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans

Untitled (Dock, Sea, and Beach), n.d.
Watercolor on paper, 6 x 9¹/₂
Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans

Untitled (Five Cows at Waterhole), n.d.
Graphite on paper, 4¹/₂ x 7¹/₄
The Museum of the National Center of Afro-American Artists, Boston

Untitled (Floral Still Life), n.d.
Oil on canvas, 30¹/₄ x 25
National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution,
Washington, D.C.; Gift of H. Alan and Melvin Frank

Untitled (Horse and Cart), n.d.
Graphite on paper, 6 x 9¹/₂
Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans

Untitled (Landscape with Bridge), n.d.
Watercolor on paper, 19 x 29¹/₂
Kenkeleba House, New York

Untitled (Landscape with Cows), n.d.
Graphite and pastel on paper, 4¹/₂ x 7¹/₄
The Museum of the National Center of Afro-American Artists, Boston

Untitled (Landscape with Cows and Stream), n.d.
Watercolor on paper, 6¹/₂ x 9¹/₄
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. David C. Driskell

Untitled (Landscape with Houses and Trees), n.d.
Watercolor on paper, 10 x 7
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. David C. Driskell

Untitled (Landscape, Woods), n.d.
Graphite on paper, 6¹/₂ x 10
Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans

Untitled (Log on Beach), n.d.
Watercolor on paper, 6 x 9¹/₂
Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans

Untitled (Maiden of the Sea), n.d.
Oil on canvas, 15 x 11
Kenkeleba House, New York

Untitled (Oak Trees), n.d.
Graphite on paper, 6³/₄ x 9³/₄
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. David C. Driskell

Untitled (Oxen and Cart with Figures), n.d.
Graphite on paper, 5³/₈ x 9¹/₂
The Museum of the National Center of Afro-American Artists, Boston

Untitled (Rhode Island Coast), n.d.
Watercolor on paper, 12 x 17
Kenkeleba House, New York

Untitled (Woodsman Returning), n.d.
Oil on canvas, 22 x 18
Collection of Nicholas P. Bruno, M.D.

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Bannister in Providence © Smithsonian Institution

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